

I, the Demon Lord, Took a Slave Elf as my Wife, but how do I Love Her?

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Prologue

"Chastel Lillqvist, your authority as a captain of the holy knights is hereby indefinitely suspended."

The head of the Kianoides branch of the church, and Chastel's direct superior, Cardinal Clavell had reported that to her three days prior. There was actually an order for house arrest, but she wasn't restrained.

With no place to belong in the church, Chastel was now wandering aimlessly through a street in Kianoides. It was the place she had once again met a certain grief-stricken girl.

"...I'm a fool too."

She mumbled to herself.

Chastel had no sword on her back, and was not wearing the baptised armour that showed she was a holy knight. Her three subordinates had said they would escort her, but she had rejected that as well. She wasn't even a knight anymore, just a normal human.

Half a month ago, a new Demon Lord was born. His name was Zagan. Mage Killer Zagan.

A Demon Lord wasn't the King of Demons, it was a title of one that had carried magic to its extremes. Sworn enemies of the church, that the church would exhaust all their power to kill.

But Chastel had refused the subjugation order for that Demon Lord, and in fact, had protested that they shouldn't attack Zagan.

And as a result, was in this situation.

Even if I do this, Zagan won't care.

He wouldn't hold his hand out to an enemy, and she doubted whether he even understood gratitude.

But still, I wanted to do something for him.

Chastel herself wasn't sure if it was because he'd saved her twice or it was some other reason.

She would be erased before too long. The church wouldn't allow a holy sword wielder to defect, they would come down on that even harder than they did to subjugate Demon Lords. The church's equipment just to kill Demon Lords.

Of course, she was scared, she'd always had a timid personality. And yet, strangely, she didn't feel any regret. She had followed her own beliefs, and wanted to think of that proudly. However, just a little, she would have liked Zagan to think of her.

The only one in his heart was that white-haired elf girl, Chastel couldn't force herself in, but she wanted to see them live peacefully, and someday happily raise a family. And for them to, just sometimes, remember her fondly. With those self-serving wishes growing stronger, she could see them in front of her.

The youth with his usual unpleasant countenance, and the pure white Elf girl. And then, an adorable girl, connecting the two of them. She had a bad expression like Zagan's, but was an adorable young girl.

"Fufu, I'm sure Zagan would be an indulgent father."

Chastel knew that he had a fundamentally kind personality.

"Do you like those clothes?"

"Yeah, thanks, Zagan."

Truly, they were a clumsy father's words. It was probably a hallucination. When she heard their voices though, Chastel came to her senses.

"Z-Zagan?"

Not thinking that he would turn up right now, Chastel cried out in disarray. He too, looked back at her.

It was no illusion.

And yet, there was a roughly ten-year-old girl between them.

"Y-you... you've already had a child...?"

The youth's face flooded with red at her confusion.

"D-d-d-d-don't say such shameless things! Nephie and I haven't..."

Then, he exchanged a glance with the elf next to him and hurriedly looked away. With the atmosphere between the two of them being pushed in her face, even Chastel wanted to punch him.

They both shook, and the girl pointed at Chastel.

"Zagan, who's that?"

Her voice seemed unused to speaking, but there were trust and affection within it. The youth nodded at the girl and turned to Chastel. Within his eyes was maybe nostalgia, or perhaps the awkwardness of being in a complicated position. Chastel couldn't help but gulp.

And then, the youth spoke:

"That's right, who are you?"

Something snapped inside her.

Does he not remember me at all...!?

Wasn't this just too much? Of course, she couldn't hold in her tears.

Let us return, to just a few days ago.

Chapter 1 — Not Even a Demon Lord Will Raise A Hand Against A Child

"The Demon Lord's Seal, huh?"

Zagan murmured, alone in the library that had been newly supplied with books. It was the library in his castle. It had always had a fairly large amount of books itself, but there were now so many that the shelves weren't enough, and there were piles of books on the floor.

About half a month ago, Zagan had inherited the legacy of the previous Demon Lord, Marchosias. The books gathered here were only a small portion of that. He'd only taken what he was interested in investigating, but it had still ended up like this.

Zagan was an eighteen-year-old youth that tiredly brushed his fringe back. His black hair grew without being cared for, and was tied up at his back. His eyes were silver, and gave him an even more overbearing air. He wore a robe, lined with red cloth.

He was a mage with the title of Demon Lord, and there was something that he needed to do.

"I couldn't find a single thing on it."

Something existed in this world, and was given the name 'demons'. No, they were hiding somehow and existed somewhere. Zagan had encountered one of them the other day.

He was loath to admit it, but it wasn't something he could defeat. And yet, he still lived like this. He raised his right hand, upon it was a crest in the shape of something like letters. That was the 'Demon Lord's Seal', and the demon had bowed its head to that seal.

I need to know exactly what this is.

It was a power beyond even demons, but it was different from any magic or symbol that Zagan knew. He'd pored over the previous Demon Lord's legacy, hoping for a clue, but the results were pitiful.

"...Phew."

He returned the books he had removed from the shelves over the past few hours. For a mage that could control not only their physical abilities, but their appetite and even need for sleep, the concept of fatigue didn't really hold. Even so, he was mentally exhausted, if this continued each day, he'd start to get depressed. He let out a sigh, deciding to take a break.

Quietly, he heard the door behind him open.

Nephie, huh?

The name of the single lodger in this castle, his apprentice, his attendant, and the girl who loved Zagan from her heart. She was of the race called elves. They were called the Faeries of Norden, and were a race with pointed ears as their characteristic. Even amongst them, Nephie, with her snow-white hair had especially potent mana.

That long hair was bound by a crimson ribbon, and her delicate and refined features were contrasted by her large, deep blue eyes. Her dainty body was covered by a maid uniform in the form of a dress and white apron, and her feet were within boots that had magic that eased the fatigue of work, her usual clothing.

When he looked to the sky from the window, he saw that the sun had already passed its zenith. She had most likely come to call him for lunch. But, because Zagan was engrossed in his books, she had remained silent to avoid disturbing him.

However, the presence behind him gradually approached.

Is she trying to surprise me perhaps?

Since a certain series of events, Nephie had begun to call Zagan not 'Master', but 'Zagan-sama'. Since then, perhaps because she had been closer to him, he felt they were somewhat more intimate. There was the possibility that she was going to play a joke on Zagan and surprise him. And of course, Zagan couldn't be so boorish as to interfere with that disposition.

Now, what shall I do?

Doing his utmost to seem like he hadn't noticed, he fidgeted, then quietly, the presence right behind him slowly reached out their hand. However, there was a difference in height of about a head between Zagan and Nephie, and on top of that, Zagan was on a step ladder to look for books.

"Whooo's... Huh? I can't reach..."

The stretching hand could only reach Zagan's shoulder. He turned and there was a girl standing right on her tip-toes, embarrassed that she couldn't reach his face. There was an unrefined collar around her neck. While it didn't have its original power of sealing magic, it was Zagan and Nephie's precious promise collar.

Her pointed ears went red to their tips.

"Umm, what should I do..."

She said in puzzlement. Her face seemed as expressionless as always, but her lips were trembling, and tears welled at the corners of her eyes. And above all, the tips of her ears were shaking, all but saying she couldn't bear the embarrassment.

At that, he couldn't bear his embarrassment either.

No, what do I do!?

He wanted to hold her tight and nuzzle against her cheek, but Zagan didn't have the courage to do something so bold to the girl he liked. Nephie twisted her fingers into her apron and muttered as she cast her eyes about the room.

"Um, I thought I could... surprise you now..."

"Surprise me and... then what?"

"Eh? Umm, I hadn't... thought of that."

Apparently, she just wanted to for some reason. Zagan wanted to smack his head against the wall as her ears quivered and she answered haltingly.

What are you trying to do to me, being that cute!?

There were many things he wanted to say, like 'even without that, your

cuteness surprised me' or 'you surprised me so much I'll just hug you like that', but he took a deep breath and calmed himself. And then, with a cough to clear his throat, said.

"Right, food then, Nephie?"

"Right, I have prepared lunch, Zagan-sama."

With both of them still red-faced, they left the archives.

It was a usual, everyday scene for the two of them.



The dining room was a huge space that could comfortably seat twelve. The floor was carpeted in red, and there was an extravagant chandelier hanging from the ceiling. There was a fireplace set into the wall that would be used if it grew a little colder.

A mere month prior, it had been blanketed in cobwebs, a room with torture implements and skeletons strewn about it, but its current cleanliness had changed it beyond recognition, it had all been cleaned by Nephie.

"I can't even recognise it."

Zagan couldn't hold in a murmur, and Nephie nodded bashfully.

"It's because it's the room you take your meals in, Zagan-sama."

"R-right. But it must have been tough to clean it alone, right?"

"No... However, there are still many rooms that I haven't been able to tend to."

Sties would have perhaps been more appropriate than rooms. Zagan helped with the heavy lifting, but fundamentally, Nephie was in charge of tending to the castle, and she even dealt with the food too, so it was probably a fair burden on her.

Maybe I should get a familiar or something...

He could also hire someone, but wanted to enjoy their life together now. However, magic dealing with familiars was outside of his area of expertise. Even as he worried, he took his seat. The table, set with a pure-white tablecloth, had already got their food arranged on it. Next to it was a trolley with a saucepan on it. He reflexively let out a sound of appreciation.

She's got more recipes again.

There were several things that he hadn't seen before. As Zagan sat at the table, Nephie began a quiet explanation.

"The bread is rye bread rolls, the appetiser is a tomato and greens salad, with a Caesar dressing and powdered cheese for flavouring."

Tomatoes were Nephie's favourite, and she was probably confident using them. Her ears perked somehow pridefully.

Incidentally, Caesar was the name of an ancient mage. He was a unique mage that had a fascination for flavour, not eternal youth, and it was said that the foundation of modern cooking was laid by him.

Following on from that, she continued her explanation as she poured soup into the empty bowls.

"This is an oatmeal consomme soup. I have prepared sauteed lamb for the main, so please, join me for this meal." She placed the bowl before Zagan as she spoke. The fragrant scent filled his nose, and she then placed the main meat course next to it. Ordinarily, this would have been everything, but she took out a bowl filled with water. "Finally, I have prepared egg pudding for dessert."

"What's egg pudding?"

It was the first time he'd heard the term.

"Manuela-san taught me. It's a sweet made by steaming egg and fresh cream... Um, it's very sweet, and tasty."

Her cheeks flushed slightly as she spoke. Zagan's face reddened at that happy expression too.

"R-right... But still, that store assistant, huh. She didn't say anything weird to you, did she?"

Nephie calmly shook her head and answered while putting her hand on her chest.

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"It's okay. She just made me wear some embarrassing clothes."
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The girl wouldn't mistrust that person.

Well, it's probably okay if it's that woman.

When Nephie had been in trouble, Manuela had followed him without regard to the risk to herself. She probably wouldn't hurt Nephie. On top of that, he felt awkward meddling in the precious girl's relationships. He still had misgivings, but Zagan urged Nephie to sit and eat too.

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"Well, let's eat."

"Let's."
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Nephie nodded deeply, and sat next to Zagan. She wore servants' clothing, but Zagan didn't think of her as a servant or slave, they took their meals together like this.

He moved the freshly baked bread to his mouth, where the fragrance of the rye and the oil of the butter spread throughout his mouth. His mouth watered as he swallowed it.

"Haaah... The meal is so delicious."

"You always say that, Zagan-sama." She may have seemed as expressionless as always, but Zagan didn't miss the slight curve to her lips. A month had already passed since he bought her, but they had this conversation every time they ate. As she ferried the soup to her own mouth, she asked. "Have you been.. Investigating something recently, Zagan-sama?"

"Hmm...? That's right, the other day, we encountered a 'demon' in those events with Barbarus, right? I was investigating that."

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"Is it difficult?"
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"It is. Even within Marchosias' legacy, I couldn't find anything approaching the core of it. I don't think for an instant a Demon Lord that had lived for a

[&]quot;That's not okay at all, is it?"

[&]quot;...? Manuela was the only one that saw, so it's okay, right?"

[&]quot;That's not the problem..."

millennium would not have had any interest in demons."

Or possibly, precisely because he *had* approached the core of it, he may have hidden it.

Maybe I should investigate Marchosias' castle again.

Zagan had inherited Marchosias' legacy along with the Crest of the Demon Lord. That wasn't just money, it was his castle and the knowledge he had. However, Zagan himself would have to investigate if anything was there, and dispel his doubts.

His gaze dropped to his right hand.

I feel like I've seen a similar symbol somewhere before though...

And relatively recently too at that.

He tilted his head in worry.

"But this is rare, that you'd ask about it. Are you interested?"

"No, but recently, whatever you have been investigating has made you seem tired, so I was worried..."

Zagan touched his face. It should have been the same as normal, had it really shown on his face that much?

That reminds me, she tried to surprise me earlier.

She was trying to cheer him up in her own way. That consideration filled his heart with warmth, but he hummed.

"He was the Demon Lord before me, everything being clear immediately would be boring. I look forward to the trouble it will give me."

"Right."

He was once again spouting meaningless bravado and harsh words, but Nephie answered as if she understood everything.

Why can't I even say 'thank you' at a time like this...?

As he was doing that, the bowls had emptied, and Nephie arranged the desserts.

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"Here."
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"R-right."

The pudding that Nephie had presented shook like jelly, and was covered in a black, caramel sauce.

What kind of food is this?

It was completely unknown to Zagan, who had subsisted on dried meat and milk until he met Nephie. Its sensation was similar to boiled eggs, but it seemed dangerous with it wobbling when the table shook and completely fell apart when nudging it with a spoon. She had called it steamed, but he couldn't tell if it was steamed or raw. He was at a loss for how to eat it, and Nephie indicated a small spoon to him.

"Here, eat it with that spoon."

"...Got it."

Resolving himself, he scooped out a spoonful from the pudding's tip. There was barely any resistance, and the light brown, wobbly substance was on top of the spoon. Concerned it would be ruined if he treated it roughly, he carefully, slowly moved it into his mouth, and then— "Mm, it's sweet."

"It is!"

Nephie gave a relieved nod.

The world is a big place, I had no idea there was such a sweet and happy tasting thing.

The corners of his eyes heated up, and it felt like he'd cry as he suddenly looked up. At the same time, he remembered another thing he had to do.

It was at that moment.

The bounded fields protecting the castle collapsed with a crash.



"...Hm? A guest."

Murmured Zagan, unconcernedly.

Centred on this castle, Zagan had placed bounded fields over his territory. Normal people would not have realised it existed before they approached. If they were to break through that, they would then be subject to vicious traps, but the intruder had broken through them too.

They are rather skilled.

Nephie tilted her head, bird-like, as if she had realised it too.

"Should we greet them?"

"... Nah, it's fine. We're eating now, we'll leave them be."

The reason he answered so leisurely was that this wasn't the first time. And this was yet another problem that Zagan had to solve.

It seems that we've gotten a 'guest' every day since I became a Demon Lord.

Zagan was currently eighteen, but would seem like a novice to mages, who lived for centuries. There were plenty of people who thought he should not have inherited the Demon Lord's throne. There weren't many people coming each day, but at least one would come every couple of days. The main invaders were those that misunderstood their power, and the church's holy knights.

...Incidentally, the first lot of invaders that had come were three knights who not only misunderstood their power, but mistook their enemy's identity too. Before, he wouldn't have been concerned about the falling sparks. But it was different now, now, Nephie was here.

The girl Zagan had first fallen in love with, and the one that had taught him happiness. Even the sparks of the masses might burn her.

I have to eradicate those morons.

That was the first step to make sure Nephie could live under the sun. If Zagan made it known just what it meant to trifle with him, the fools that would lay a hand on Nephie would vanish as well. The first thing would be to torment those that challenged him like this, to etch fear and despair into them and turn them away. Because the dead couldn't spread fear.

Yet, he was eating pudding next to Nephie.

I don't want to show Nephie the traps and make her look at me like that.

He would rather not be cruel in front of her. As kindhearted as she was, she would probably grieve for the deaths of the masses, and it might even scare her.

If she hated me like that, I don't think I could recover.

So he didn't stand, and continued enjoying lunch with Nephie.

But they might make it this far this time.

The current invader had torn through Zagan's bounded fields without being caught. If they could avoid the rest, they might reach the castle.

He carefully kept eating the pudding that would only need another mouthful. He couldn't rush eating something this good. The intruder was approaching, but Zagan was wholeheartedly enjoying every mouthful.

"Hmm, this really is delicious."

"Thank you very much. But, is this okay? That guest is..."

She was probably concerned about the invader, as she spoke restlessly.

"It's the same as always. Coming during lunch is rude, don't worry about it."

"Haaah."

Even as she let out a bewildered noise, Nephie said no more. Instead, she broke the bread apart and ate it. Perhaps because her mouth was small, she ate slowly. Watching her hurriedly eat was also something he secretly enjoyed. She ate like that until she had finished about half of her food.

The castle gate broke with the sound of an explosion.

"...What an impatient guest."

It seemed that they had avoided all of Zagan's trap bounded fields, and that they knew where Zagan was from his presence. They were coming straight for the dining room.

"...Haah."

The door could be fixed with magic, but there would be no stopping the dust from getting on the food.

Reluctantly, Zagan waved a finger through the air, and the door opened. The thing that appeared in the opening was a mysterious, masked figure. The mask was in the shape of a snake or something, and seemed like some tribe's native wear. Their body was completely covered in a jet-black robe, and a lowered hood concealed their race. Limbs covered in boorish armour showed from under the robe.

Perhaps because they hadn't expected to be greeted, the figure stood stock still, seemingly wincing.

They're huge.

Zagan was of average height for an adult man, but the figure was another head taller. Finally, the figure murmured in conviction.

"Are you the Demon Lord Zagan?"

It was a mumbling voice that was hard to understand.

"Introduce yourself before you demand someone's name... But I remember you too, you're the Apparition Valefar, aren't you?"

Just seeing such a strange figure once would ensure you wouldn't forget it. They were definitely one of the mages that had been at the auction he had bought Nephie at. Barbarus had said they were one of the candidates to be Demon Lord at the time. He had ignored them back then, but to think they would meet like this.

Valefar thrust out an armoured finger.

"Demon Lord Zagan, I shall defeat you, and take your power."

They were honest and clumsy words for a mage. However, Zagan didn't look at Valefar and spoke with a voice full of bloodlust that would engrave fear upon them.

"I'm eating now. Wait there for a while."

"Ngh..."

Valefar stepped back, as if overwhelmed by Zagan's unusually vigorous declaration.

...And yet, the spoon in Zagan's hand picked up pudding.

I want to enjoy all of Nephie's pudding.

It might have sounded like he was being mocking, but Zagan was deadly serious. His meal being interrupted was irritating, and the declaration with the solemnity of a Demon Lord sent Valefar to their knee. Then Nephie murmured uneasily.

"Zagan-sama, if you like it, I can make it again."

"I'd like that, but whether I'll put down my spoon here is a different matter."

When he returned that, Valefar grit their teeth.



"Don't... belittle me...!"

The masked figure raised an arm, which began to shine with magic. They had

come to challenge Zagan, knowing he was a Demon Lord. It was probably their strongest magic.

However, nothing happened.

""

Suddenly, he could feel a trembling from the other side of the mask.

"If you're going to attack a mage's territory, at least research them. My name is the Mage Killer, magic has no effect on me."

Zagan 'ate' other people's magic. Within his own territory, he could suppress magic. However talented a mage this figure was, there was no way they could win, being a mage.

Zagan let out, mixed with a sigh as he spooned up his pudding.

If a titled mage leaves without being able to do anything, that alone will demonstrate my power.

Even lost as he was in the pudding, he hadn't lost sight of his goal.

However, Valefar spoke in admiration.

"I see, even inexperienced, you're a Demon Lord."

As they shouted that, the figure's arms changed. The steal armour became hard scales, and the fingers turned into stake-like claws. Those claws felt like they would pulverise rock, even without magic.

This isn't magic...?

Plenty of magic ran through the circle, and nothing happened. They hadn't changed the incantations or charms, and there was no change in the flow of the magic itself.

There were countless sapient races in this world. Therianthropes with fangs and claws of beasts, winged people. Because those races' fangs and claws weren't magic, they weren't stopped even when magic was sealed. Valefar's arms' changing was, therefore, one of those. The figure's were dragon arms. Dragons were divine creatures, spoken of in the same legends as elves. They too were a race that refused contact with the lower world, and had more

intelligence and magic than humans, and boasted of magic that surpassed even that of the elves. They were existences that as they aged took on the title of gods and demons.

Though, it's fairly weak for a dragon. Are they a mage that gained a dragon's power?

At any rate, they had a power removed from magic. This was probably their basis for challenging a Demon Lord. Valefar leapt into the dining room and attacked him with those dragon claws.

"I said I'm eating. I'll deal with you later, so won't you wait a while?"

However, Zagan stopped them with a single hand. The spoon that should have been in that hand was in his mouth, and he was carefully looking after the pudding in his left hand. He could tell Valefar's eyes had gone wide behind the mask. Even so, the figure didn't give up.

"You mock me!"

The mask's mouth dropped open, and magic light began to gather there.

This was part of the legends, dragons could burn their mana inside them and breathe light. That was exactly when Valefar was doing. And Zagan had no method to seal a dragon's breath.

Zagan's face hardened, and he growled.

You fool, I warned you!

"Dust might get on the food, but that's enough!"

He had a feeling his stance and words were mixed up, but Zagan took his hand from the claws and shot forward with it, forcing the mouth closed. The breath dispersed, and though they were forced back by the palm of his hand, that attack had been right from underneath and jarred their head, sending the figure's huge body flying.

Startled, Nephie covered her face. And when she timidly opened her deep blue eyes, the figure had landed with a heavy thump.

The dragonification reverted, and the mask had cracks running through it.

It seemed they had lost consciousness.

Checking that the nuisance had fallen silent, Zagan hummed.

I've calmed down too.

Before, he would have massacred an enemy like this, and would never have gone easy on them and just knocked them out, a mere month ago, this would have been unthinkable.

This was solely due to his life with Nephie changing him. Zagan murmured, pondering how miraculous this happiness was.

"Maybe I should strengthen the fields a bit. There'll probably be more of these annoyances."

He had defeated them soundly, but Valefar was by no means weak. In the past, Zagan wouldn't have been certain of victory fighting up front. His ease of winning was because he had grown stronger.

Marchosias' legacy and the Demon Lord's Seal. Magic was stronger in proportion to the knowledge someone had. Zagan had rapidly gained power from inheriting the Demon Lord's throne.

Sighing, Nephie stood from her seat, somewhat pale. Leaving her food, she rushed over to the figure.

"Nephie, leave them be, they won't wake until we're done."

"No, perhaps they're..."

As Nephie went to pick them up, their limbs rolled across the floor.

"?"

Zagan paled at that.

Eh? Wait, I just hit them, right? I didn't tear their limbs off?

Even though he'd vowed not to massacre people in front of Nephie, it seemed he'd broken that vow.

As he was in a fluster, Nephie murmured "I was right..." as she removed the broken mask.

"Zagan-sama, they are still a child."

Underneath the mask was a young, possibly ten-year-old, face. And a girl's at that.

Her hair was the green of spring buds. They couldn't tell the colour of her eyes past her closed eyelids, but she had long eyelashes. Her lips were a fresh peach colour, and her cheeks were flushed from being within the bulky robe.

The armour's limbs were fake, and papier-mache. She most likely controlled the hollow armour with magic or something. Now, Zagan realised what he had done.

Did I just knock out a little girl?

He was full of questions, questions like why a child had the power of a dragon, why were they acting like a mage, and whether they were the real Valefar.

However, this wasn't a situation for him to be calm and gloat. He opened his mouth to hide his shaking.

"Phew... D-don't panic, Nephie. We can treat her if you're worried. Umm, that's right, I should have some cold medicine. She won't die, right? She'll live, right? Should we move her to a room with a bed?"

"Calm down please, Zagan-sama. You don't use cold medicine on injured people." Nephie admonished Zagan, who had been unable to hide any of his panic whatsoever. Softly placing a hand on her cheek, Nephie nodded. "It's okay, she's just unconscious. She doesn't seem hurt."

"R-really? Really. She won't die, right?"

"She won't."

Finally, Zagan calmed down. And at that, Nephie seemed unexpectedly proud.

"W-what?"

"It's just you really are kind, Zagan-sama."

"Huh...?"

Zagan's eyes widened, and Nephie lifted Valefar. She was small, but it seemed

difficult for Nephie to lift her, as slight as she was. Even troubled, Zagan lifted her up in Nephie's place.

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"Is this okay?"

"Yes."

"Honestly, what a troublesome invader."
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Grumbling under his breath, he still worried about having hit a child in front of Nephie, and the girl herself huddled in close to him.

This was the first change that was visited upon their life together.

Chapter 2 — Picking up and Holding a Dragon Will Make Her Your Daughter

"Chastel Lillqvist, your authority as a captain of the holy knights is hereby indefinitely suspended."

These events had started about half a month ago, a young mage by the name of Zagan had ascended to the briefly vacant throne of the thirteenth Demon Lord.

Of course, the church had begun to gather manpower to bring him down while he was still inexperienced, and Chastel had rebelled against that.

"I have been saved by the mage Zagan twice, I cannot betray that."

There was surely a more roundabout way to say it, but even with the vast power of a Demon Lord, Zagan wouldn't change his way of life.

Chastel silently bowed her head at her direct superior's words. The holy sword that symbolised her was not at her side. Without an owner, it was enshrined in the church's treasure vaults.

Chastel was ashamed of herself seeing him.

So I don't want to yield myself and fight him.

She was one of the church's greatest assets in battle, a holy sword wielder, and even further, she was the lone woman and was the cause of much of their support from the populace, and had acted in such a way as to renunciate the church.

It had then come to her not eliminating Zagan, and thus came the Cardinal's proclamation. In other words, even Zagan's elimination would have no more meaning than a display of power for the church. They simply justified themselves by saying that all mages were evil. So it was a problem that she was more disaffected with her comrades than a powerful mage.

Maybe the church's decay has gone as far as it will.

Chastel stifled a sigh and the knights behind her raised their voices.

"Please wait, your eminence! This decision is too far."

"Indeed! Chastel-dono's achievements up to this point should show enough for the circumstances to be taken into account."

"Also, losing a holy sword when a new Demon Lord has just appeared will do nought but attract chaos, will it not!"

"Enough, all of you!"

Chastel raised her voice at the knights' rebellion. The elderly Cardinal looked hard at the now silent knights, and then let out a lamenting sigh.

"Does it appear that I feel nothing at this decision?"

"We..."

The Cardinal, now looking older than he had before had spoken quietly and mournfully. The knights could do no more than fall silent.

I just... wanted to protect those I could reach, that's why I became a holy knight...

She had been granted the power of a holy sword, and held pride in protecting the populace from mages' outrageous persecution.

At some point, it had become that she couldn't even wield the sword by her own will, and only at the orders of the church.

A simple phrase, that a mage was not evil, had caused this uproar.

But, I can't even pay Zagan back.

At the least, the formation of the subjugation squad would be greatly delayed. They wouldn't not take measures against a shrewd mage like him, and it should be something that would give him some time.

Suddenly, she remembered the Elf at Zagan's side. She had taken the position of his attendant, and grown close to Chastel as her friend. She felt that they could be good friends if she wasn't a holy knight.

She was thinking these things after such a long time, and the Cardinal placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Chastel, do no despair so. As time passes, your punishment may be revoked."

Chastel's eyes widened at these words he spoke to give her hope.

"What do you..."

The Cardinal looked at her like a beloved daughter.

"A holy sword chooses its own wielder. Ordinarily, censuring a wielder would be unthinkable. Therefore, endure, these old bones will try and manage something."

"...I am honoured by your words."

Chastel quietly replied.

The church is warped, but it might still be salvageable.

At least, there might be someone that Chastel could accept. Her eyes burned, but the Cardinal's expression was severe.

"However, take heart, Chastel. My being able to protect you is politics."

"...And what are they saying?"

He let out another grieving sigh and then Cardinal Clavell spoke darkly.

"The one known as the terrifying holy knight captain Raphael Hurandel, a holy sword wielder like you, is heading here."

Chastel swallowed at that name.

He was well known, adding to his exploits even as he passed fifty. He was, of course, skilled with the blade, but his brutality earned him the moniker of 'the terrifying'.

Clavell quietly continued.

"I wouldn't dare to criticise a holy sword wielder but disquieting rumours of him have reached even my ears."

A man who was known as 'the terrifying' was coming to Chastel's — an apostate's — location.

A purge. That bloodstained phrase came to mind, but Clavell's words were

different.

"That he gathers like-minded people and is creating a new faction of influence within the church."

Chastel's eyes widened at that. She didn't know how great that influence was, but it was the church that had declared that mages were evil. Even amongst the holy knights and clergy, there should be a reasonable number of sympathisers.

'The Terrifying' would gain all the more influence. His approach here, with this timing...

This might be a signal.

An apostate that was also a holy sword wielder would be a blot upon the church. If another wielder were to cut them down, that rumour would resound across the lands like a tremor, and destabilise the church significantly.

But that's just what I want.

Her own future may be plunged into darkness, but she did not regret it.



"Where am...?"

The young girl — Valefar murmured as she blearily opened her eyes.

She was in the room of a castle. A little while ago, it had been the location of experiments on mysterious specimens, but it was now a fine guest room.

The only people that would visit Zagan would be those that were aiming to assassinate him or steal his research, and the only others would be those that had unearned enmity for him. He had thought there was no meaning in readying a guest room, but Nephie had said 'Barbarus-sama will come will he not?' and neatly put it in order.

He had no intention of letting that scoundrel use the room she had so wonderfully prepared, but there might still be other guests.

Nephie's friends might come after all.

Like the store assistant in Kianoides whose name had come up earlier, Manuela, or the holy knight she had somehow become acquainted with,

Chastel.

If they were to come, not even Zagan would coldly turn them away.

Zagan and Nephie were side by side in that room, watching over Valefar. The girl's gaze wandered in bewilderment in the small room, so at odds with the ruined appearance that this castle appeared to have from the outside.



Seeing that, Zagan relaxed.

Ah, thank goodness, she's alive.

Nephie *had* confirmed she was alive, and she had breathed while she slept, but he was uneasy as to whether she would actually wake.

Zagan fundamentally wouldn't kill his opponent if he could avoid it.

There was the consideration for Nephie's sake, but there was also the problem of dealing with the corpses within his territory so he usually just expelled them. Though that said, he didn't check if they were alive.

There was no need to lack confidence in his allowances.

The girl called Valefar now had the armour and robes removed and was lying down on the bed. She was only wearing an old shirt beneath the papier-mache armour, not even wearing trousers.

She may be a child, but she had probably learnt to not wear anything other than the essentials under the armour.

Her green hair was gathered into three bunches, and two horns jutted backwards from between them. Her eyes, finally exposed, were gold, and she came roughly to Zagan's waist in terms of height.

As far as looks went, excepting the horns, she was a young human girl.

"...You!"

She seemed to have finally come to her senses, and Valefar's golden eyes shot open and she leapt first at Zagan.

"...Hmm, well if you're this energetic, you should be fine."

Zagan unconcernedly halted her fist. It could be called a fist, but being hit by it would be more or less a pleasant tap. However, Zagan could feel power sufficient to turn an average mage's arm into mincemeat.

Well, she's a mage after all.

Those that aimed to be mages started by strengthening their body. Extending their lifespan, gaining the power to pulverise rock, and keeping even illness and sleep at bay. Doing this eliminated interference in their own research.

So humans could not win against mages. Even without controlling fire and lightning, their pure strength and speed surpassed human comprehension. If

Zagan hadn't stopped her fist, the room would have suffered greatly.

However, there was an air of difficulty about it somehow. Valefar was a mage that would have stood shoulder to shoulder with Barbarus and Zagan before he succeeded as a Demon Lord. And so, unlike average mages and bandits, she was an enemy to be wary of.

But, she's a brat.

She was short, and her cheeks looked soft and squishy, she was a genuine child. He didn't know whether to overpower her or be gentle.

In any case, it was difficult. Even with her fist stopped, Valefar growled menacingly, and Zagan scratched his cheek.

"Hmph, thank Nephie. I wouldn't have mercy on a brat, if Nephie hadn't begged for your life, you'd be decapitated and tossed away outside."

Those words should finally make her understand she was being 'allowed to live', and that if he willed it, Zagan could deal with her in an instant.

I wouldn't do something so cruel in front of Nephie though!

The strength behind the fist finally faded.

"...Why?"

Just as her appearance implied, her voice was young and had a slight lisp to it. The muffled voice from earlier was probably due to an ability of that mask, which seemed like something she had made.

Zagan tilted his head at her question.

"Why what?"

"I... came here to kill you. Why would you not... kill an enemy?"

Zagan raised his eyebrows in apparent disinterest.

"I told you, didn't I? Nephie saved you. So I let you live. That's all."

Even if he'd killed her in self-defence, he would obviously have some heartache about killing an adorable girl like this. He really was glad they had realised before he killed her.

But I can't feel any animosity or hatred from her.

She might have been defeated, but surely an enemy would be more violent with resentment or disgrace. It may just have been that she lost her will to fight, but that was unlikely for a mage that had a few moments prior aimed for Zagan's life.

If anything, Valefar seemed more confused than Zagan. Even in both of their confusion, Zagan threw a question at her.

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"So, why did you attack me?"
"..."
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His receipt of the Demon Lord's power had been announced, but mages didn't ordinarily fixate on strength. No, you could probably say that they put a different meaning to strength. The strength that mages wanted was knowledge and techniques, and they showed no interest in strength for fighting others. Because mages simply gained it when they gained knowledge. Strength followed on its own as they gained knowledge. The strength to fight could be used to subjugate others, but it wasn't too helpful to gain knowledge. Gaining knowledge was equivalent to gaining power, but the converse wasn't the case. And yet, what Valefar wanted was that power to fight.

A Demon Lord's power was the immense amount of mana given to them by the Demon Lord's Seal, not knowledge. There were people that wanted the Demon Lord's territory and riches, but desiring the 'power' was baffling for a mage.

Valefar stiffened in fright at his steady stare.

She really does seem like a child when she does that.

At least, it was incongruous with a mage that could even breathe dragon breath. Nephie was fretfully watching over them, and Valefar opened her mouth with a groan.

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"...I wanted power."
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[&]quot;Hmm, though I don't think you mean the power a mage is usually after, do you?"

Mages grew strong simply to defend themselves, they had the power to lengthen their lives and to protect their riches. It was a method, not the goal, not something to risk your life for.

Well, there are always exceptions.

Valefar spoke through her shame at Zagan's statement.

"...I'm weak, so... I need... power."

"I see, you need power to live after all."

It contradicted the concept of a mage, but he could understand that answer. In the first place, Zagan had done nothing but refine his power for eternal youth. In other words, Zagan was one of those exceptions that focused on power more than knowledge. So there was no need for Zagan and Nephie to be the opponent, which was the reason she held no ill-will or hatred.

"So why did you target me of all people? Didn't you think you hadn't prepared to challenge a Demon Lord?"

"You are a new Demon Lord, and if your title of Mage Killer is true, you should be weak to things other than mages."

"So you thought you could beat me?"

Valefar nodded at his overwhelming speech, her hands shaking slightly.

It sort of feels like I'm bullying someone weak.

It didn't feel particularly pleasant. Zagan was the one targeted, but it felt like he was being wicked. How to describe the situation, well the atmosphere was bizarre in any case.

"Well, your thoughts were correct, but you don't have enough power to kill me."

"...ch..."

Valefar didn't answer, but she chewed at her lips.

Lacing his fingers behind his head, Zagan leaned back and asked the thing that was more on his mind.

"By the way, you're a dragon right?"

Valefar shuddered.

"...I am."

"So there are still some alive. You grow far stronger than humans just by living, right? So why do you want power so much?"

Their race grew into strength that surpassed human intellect. They didn't even need to gain knowledge like mages. Dragons were recorded in legends as being able to devour even gods if they lived past ten thousand years. Fighting with such a slim chance of victory was almost the action of a human.

Is she rushing it?

Maybe she had a reason she needed to become strong immediately. Valefar's eyes welled with tears as she looked down.

"But..."

She didn't seem to want to be asked about it. Her frail, hunched position meant that she didn't even look like a mage, let alone a dragon.

"Ah, that's right!"

Looking at her, Zagan finally realised what caused his unease.

She's the same as me when I was caught stealing food!

It was nothing so grand as enmity or hatred. It was simply the same as when he fell into a situation like failing to steal some food, or when he pick-pocketed someone and they turned out to be bandits as a child, and suffered the consequences.

Zagan had countless memories of that himself, so understood all too well. Nephie tilted her head at his understanding.

"Zagan-sama, what is it?"

"Just my past."

I get it. It's like she found an easy looking target and took a stab, then got pounded down and is half in tears.

If he replaced her 'I wanted power' with 'I wanted bread', he really understood.

So the 'I'm hungry' eased his anger.

Of course what she'd done was wrong, but rather than shouting and asking why, he should scold her and tell her it was wrong. Because he had been intending to speak to a mage and an enemy, Zagan had ended up caught in the bizarre atmosphere. He had been approaching it wrong from the start.

So that decides how I should treat her.

Suddenly feeling that his harsh posture was ridiculous, Zagan let out a hmph.

"Well, whatever. Thus you came to challenge me, a Demon Lord. You must be punished."

"Um, Zagan-sama..."

Nephie spoke up, entreating, but Zagan nodded back in understanding. Whatever horrific act she was imagining, even the tears in Valefar's eyes began to shake. Zagan's judgement on that little girl was this: "For the following week, I order you to be Nephie's assistant!"

""...Eh?""

At this, Nephie and Valefar both let out a noise of confusion.

"You need more help with cleaning, right?"

"Eh, ah, yes."

Zagan nodded arrogantly back at Nephie's jerky nodding.

"Then, use her as you will."

If Valefar held no grudge against Zagan, she wouldn't be fixated on the throne of the Demon Lord. And so, there was no need to go as far to kill her. This much was safe to punish a child with.

And she can be taught right and wrong while she's helping.

Zagan couldn't speak high handedly about the concepts of good and evil, but he could teach her the common sense and rules of a villain at least. She was a child, and Zagan was only a step into adulthood.

If she carried on the same way, that was of no concern to Zagan, if she could make the judgement herself that was fine.

Valefar looked at Zagan in disbelief.

"You're not... going to eat me?"

Zagan felt dizzy at those unexpected words.

"... Wait a minute, why would I be eating you?"

Zagan knew that his face was that of a villain, but he couldn't accept that it made him seem like he would eat a child whole. Valefar opened her mouth uneasily.

"...I heard... people grow strong if they... can get dragon flesh and blood."

"Yeah, that is in the legends now I think about it."

Legends had existed since time immemorial that bathing in dragon blood would make one invulnerable, eating their flesh would give limitless mana, and drinking an infusion of their bones would act as a panacea. Actually, when Valefar's limbs had been dragonified, he thought that she might have been a mage that had used those techniques.

So that's why she's so scared.

Humans were meat eaters, if they caught her for food, even is she could talk they wouldn't let her live. Just like when Nephie was targeted, that was probably the reason for the papier mache armour and mask.

Even if she was a dragon, Valefar was still a young girl. Maybe young dragon would be more appropriate. She wasn't someone that a holy knight or a powerful mage couldn't overcome, so she needed to hide her true nature. Using human magic was to protect herself too.

Thinking along those lines, it was clear that the girl would seek the power to fight. Zagan hmmed through his nose.

"Don't be an idiot. Would I be able to do something like that? Eating a brat like you would, whether you were a dragon or a human, would leave a bad aftertaste."

When he said that, Valefar's eyes teared up again, perhaps because she was scared again.

This is why I hate kids...

Even so, he remembered when he was chased off to the rubbish dump and looked after by the older children. What would they have done?

He was sure...

Zagan let out a small sigh and opened his mouth.

"Nephie, is there much of lunch left?"

"Yes, there's bread and soup."

Nephie answered as her ears wiggled in puzzlement at why he'd ask that. Zagan then bluntly spoke.

"...Bring them here."

Nephie blinked in surprise and then smiled.

"I will! I'll heat it up and bring them."

She left the room with a soft patter of steps, leaving behind Zagan, who had a dissatisfied look on his face, and Valefar, who was taken aback.

"...What... are you going to do?"

"Don't you know? This is charity, the pity given by the strong to the weak."

He'd thought of kind and reassuring words, but it was a haughty line that came from Zagan's mouth.

When Zagan had been a vagrant there was a boy that had shared some bread with him when he was about to starve to death. It had been a rather helpful feeling to him, who wanted power to live.

I can still remember what that bread tasted like.

Valefar wasn't starving, but he thought giving her food might ease her nervousness. He didn't particularly care if she liked or hated him, but it was annoying to have her constantly afraid of something that wouldn't happen, so he thought he would do the same as that boy.

Valefar didn't know whether to be angry or scared, but Nephie soon returned with food on a trolley.

"Here."

When Valefar saw the dish that Nephie was holding out, her face finally settled on shame.

"Just to warn you, I hate those that waste food the most. Especially if they waste Nephie's cooking... I'll kill them, you know?"

Valefar took the bowl of soup as she trembled at Zagan's completely honest words, then carefully took the spoon and ladled up some soup.

"...It's tasty."

"Hmph, of course it is."

Zagan nodded pridefully, and Nephie's ears went red in embarrassment.

"Thank you very much."

Zagan was somewhat embarrassed at that and rose.

"Then I will return to the archives. You help Nephie once you are done eating."

He went to leave the room with that, but Valefar called out in confusion.

"W-wait."

"...What is it this time?"

"Don't you think... I might attack her? Or that I might run away?"

"Do as you will." Answered Zagan unconcernedly. "If you don't understand what it would mean to run away from me, with me knowing your secret, that's fine."

Valefar had said it herself. A young dragon could be attacked even more easily than an elf if they were careless.

Well, I don't intend to spread that around though.

But releasing her with no punishment would mean there was no meaning to rebuking invaders. That was the reason the punishment was cleaning. On top of that, Nephie would be able to teach her right and wrong far more gently than he would.

Continuing on, his gaze moved to Nephie. There was another clear answer to her question.

"That, and you seem to be misunderstanding something, Nephie is far stronger than you, you know?"

Her behaviour when they just met aside, Nephie now had the will to live, and if she used 'Sorcery' to survive she surpassed even holy knights. And of course, there were bounded fields on the castle to protect Nephie. It would be hard to defeat Nephie in Zagan's territory, even with a holy sword.

Leaving behind Nephie and the dumbfounded girl, Zagan headed to the archives.



Isn't it a little dangerous still?

It was several hours later. Even though he had left the room, Zagan was worried about Nephie and Valefar and watched them from afar. He didn't think Nephie would lose based on strength, but he didn't know if Valefar would use a surprise attack.

When he thought of that, he wondered if he should check on them and in the end hid his presence and followed them.

They were putting the crockery away and making preparations for dinner it seemed. The larger amount than usual was probably including Valefar's portion. Valefar herself seemed to have realised that going against them wasn't wise, and was helping with the cleaning as Nephie asked.

Incidentally, a robe was hanging from her shoulders, apparently, she had used magic to adjust the size to her stature. Or maybe this was its original size and she'd adjusted it to fit with her armour's size. In any case, it didn't make him worry about where to look.



"Valefar-san, put this back please."

"...Fol is fine." She spoke timidly, apparently, she wasn't as wary of Nephie as

Zagan. And then, she continued on in a murmur. "Umm... did you... make the soup?"

"I did, I make all of the food here."

"It was... tasty."

It seemed that allowing Nephie to use a nickname was her way of giving thanks.

"You're welcome." Nephie nodded expressionlessly, her ears shivering. "Then, if you would, Fol?"

"...Right."

She might be a dragon, but she looked like a little girl. Watching her small form darting around Nephie's legs somehow brought a smile to Zagan's face. As he watched them, Nephie finally asked Valefar a question.

"Are you scared of Zagan-sama?"

"...Yeah."

"Zagan-sama might have a scary face, but he's really a kind person, you know?"

Well, Nephie was scared originally too. He was aware he looked like a bad person, so there was no helping people being scared. However, Valefar shook her head back and forth, and the three braids on her back shook like tails.

"His face isn't scary, I think if his mouth split a little more, he could be called handsome."

"Could... he?"

If Zagan's mouth split further, it really would seem like that of a dragon or demon.

Ah, I guess it's a difference in aesthetics...

He was called good looking from a dragon's perspective, but being seen as non-human actually saddened him instead.

Valefar spoke to Nephie as she tilted her head in question.

"What's scary is... his power. I couldn't... do a single thing."

Well, that was a natural reaction.

Yeah, of course you'd be scared of someone that hit you.

It was good that she had realised they wouldn't eat her. Nephie spoke gently to her.

"It's okay, Zagan-sama isn't the type to use his power arbitrarily."

At this, Zagan tilted his head in wonder.

Huh? Am I not?

He was doing his best not to kill in front of Nephie, but he had still incinerated bandits and a mage that didn't know his place. However, Valefar nodded.

"...Right, he didn't even show a fragment... of his true power."

I'm not going to hit a child at full strength!

He wanted to protest, but he couldn't say anything to someone he had already hit. If he had known she was such a young girl, he would have thought of something else, but...

Valefar spoke in confusion.

"...He's a weird human."

"I think he's an idiosyncratic person."

Nephie really did know how to choose her words. As Zagan was rejuvenated by her words, Nephie asked Valefar another question.

"Fol, what will you do now?"

"...I don't know. I'm too weak to attack other Demon Lords."

"You really do need power, don't you?"

"...Yeah."

She was almost like a lost child... well, she was an actual child. Zagan had an awkward expression at her voice.

I thought dragons were more patient.

They were existences said to live through centuries, millennia, and depending on the circumstances, more than ten millennia. And yet Valefar seemed to be rushing on a human scale.

Why is a young dragon acting like a mage in the first place?

It was baffling. As Zagan wracked his mind over it, Valefar now asked Nephie a question.

"Nephie, why do you follow him?"

"...Zagan-sama bought me, and I came here. But he doesn't treat me a slave, but as a person. So this is where I belong."

"...Right."

For some reason, her voice seemed to hold loneliness and envy. Nephie probably noticed that too, because she stopped and crouched down in front of Valefar, meeting her gaze.

"Do you not have anywhere like that, Fol?"

"...No."

She answered in a lonely, quavering voice.

This is why I hate brats...

Zagan grimaced, finding out something he didn't want to know.



Several days had passed. Valefar was still sometimes afraid, but had relaxed enough to hold a normal conversation and followed not just Nephie's commands without complaint, but Zagan's as well.

Zagan himself didn't give any extreme orders, so she obediently aided Nephie, and when they were together, Nephie and Valefar would have their own conversations.

Well, it's good for Nephie to have an assistant that's the same gender.

So Zagan decided to quietly leave them alone.

He was searching through the books today, but...

"This is the last of the books from Marchosias' castle."

He was currently skimming over, and had just finished, the new books he had obtained.

But, there's nothing about demons or the Demon Lord's Seal.

It seemed he would indeed need to search through Marchosias' legacy again, but the last time, he hadn't found anything more important. If he did so with no forethought the same thing would happen.

"If there was another mage..."

That was something he wouldn't have thought in the past. Zagan was a mage with different knowledge and ways of thinking, so this was something that his pupil, Nephie, couldn't help with.

The first mage other than himself that he thought of was Barbarus, but if Zagan showed him the Demon Lord's legacy, it wouldn't end well. Another mage came to mind, but in the end, he wasn't sure how much he could trust them. And so, he decided to approach it from another direction.

Maybe I should look for information from a sector other than magic?

The first thing that called to mind was the church. They were an organisation that revered something like the One God, and were called natural enemies of mages that wore baptised armour to act against a mage's physical strength. It was also said that there were twelve holy sword wielders amongst them that with their powers combined could rank equally with a Demon Lord.

It would be natural for them to hold on to information that mages didn't have, but it wouldn't be wise for Zagan to act with no preparations even if he was a Demon Lord.

Suddenly, he remembered an awkward girl's face.

I wonder if she ended up safe?

She was called the Maiden of the Holy Sword, and though she had fought with Zagan, she was Nephie's friend. He had helped her when she was captured by Barbarus, but didn't know what had become of her after that.

Well, nothing good will come of a holy knight meeting with a mage.

She was a girl that was too serious in the strangest of ways. It would be for both of their benefit to not meet, but she had done her best to let Zagan go free when they had fought.

If they met again, she might put herself in a dilemma by hesitating to cut Zagan and strangely protecting him. Zagan hadn't asked her to do anything, but seeing other people ruined due to him wasn't a good feeling.

I quess I'll ask Nephie later.

By her position, it would be convenient to have her die, but she wasn't someone he should hate as a person, and if she were to die without his knowledge, it would leave a bad taste in his mouth. That was the extent of his concern.

"There's a mountain of problems..."

As he carried on like that, the door to the archives opened soundlessly.

Valefar, huh?

She was alone for once, and stood silently at the door as Zagan looked back at her.

"Is there something you wanted?"

"...Dinner... is prepared."

She was as wary as ever, but her voice wasn't hostile.

Zagan closed his book and nodded.

"I see, I'm on my way."

As he left the archives for the dining room, Valefar was still looking up at him.

"Is there something you wanted to say, Valefar?"

"...Why... haven't you killed me?"

It seemed she had opened her heart to Nephie slightly, but still thought that Zagan might kill her.

Zagan answered with a shrug.

"I've told you, again and again, Nephie took a liking to you, so I spared you."

"Don't you... think I might attack you from behind like this."

Zagan smiled wryly at that. Just the other day he had had a similar conversation with Barbarus.

She might look like a child, but she's a mage with things like this.

He wondered how human-like dragons were and sighed through his nose.

"Someone else said the same kind of thing, and then I told him to do it whenever he wanted. He knows a lot about alcohol, so every time I defeat him, he'll have to bring me some." Zagan finally looked back at her as he answered. "So I'll say the same to you. Come at me whenever you like. Each time you lose, you'll work more for Nephie."

If Nephie looks after her, it's fine to have her here for a while!

He absolutely wasn't moved by her loneliness the other day. Fol's expression turned dangerous at that haughty answer.

"...Don't... you think I'll steal your knowledge."

There were over ten thousand books contained within these archives. Marchosias' legacy only increased that number and not even Zagan knew the precise number. The accumulated knowledge of a mage was held within these books.

A mage fundamentally increased their power by complicating their magic circles. They could not use chants or tools instead, but the basic mechanism didn't change. These complications were the symbols called 'circuits'. These books each contained a circuit, so if you understood the book, you could also be said to have more circuits. Of course, 'understanding' was shown in those circuits' uses in any form, not just in magic circles.

And so, magic could be 'stolen'.

Valefar herself should have digested a roughly equal amount of books as Zagan had, if she was of similar power.

By that logic, maybe having more than ten thousand tomes is a criterion for being a Demon Lord candidate.

The number of circuits did not necessarily correlate with ability, but it was a

rough approximation.

However, Zagan shrugged with a distinct lack of concern.

"I don't really mind."

"Wha..."

Valefar's eyes opened wide in shock at Zagan answering as if that were obvious.

"Is it really so surprising?"

"...Do you... think it's not?"

Her face was that of a person faced with absurdity.

I have no interest in books I've already understood.

Zagan did not re-read books he had already obtained circuits from. The books here were all those that he had already read, so he didn't care a whit if they were stolen, burned, or whatever. Perhaps his comprehension of being able to fully understand a book with a single reading was the main cause of him becoming a Demon Lord.

However, it seemed that Valefar didn't understand this, and she kept looking up at him in confusion. Scratching his head, Zagan answered tiredly.

"I think that techniques and knowledge are things that are stolen. Even I killed the mage that lived here... I think he was Andras, well, whatever, I killed him and took his knowledge."

He was kidnapped to be a sacrifice when he was a vagrant, that was when Zagan had turned the tables on Andras and become a mage.

The reason that a normal human like Zagan had been able to kill him was that he had seen Andras' magic and stolen it. And even now, that technique was the basis of Zagan's power.

Stolen things are useful when the time comes.

So even if someone appeared that would steal from him, he didn't feel like he had any reason to stop them.

"Of course, I won't teach you so carefully and attentively as I do Nephie, but

by the same token, I have no intention of stopping you from sneaking into the archives and learning my magic. Well, if you were to take and destroy the books I haven't read yet, that would be a different matter."

That said, he had already read all of those that he had brought from Marchosias' legacy so there weren't any left that he would be worried about.

And no one would complain about that method to 'obtain power'.

The reason he went out of his way to tell her this might be because he could see his past self in her. Zagan might have been a worthless nuisance, but there was still the boy that had held out his hand like an older sibling. Surely, he wanted to act like him.

Valefar shook her head.

"...I can't understand you. You're hubristic, you could force me to obey. But why don't you?"

Nephie would be sad if I did that!

Or if not, he had a feeling that she would disapprove. There was no way he could do such a thing in front of Nephie.

Zagan snorted at Valefar, who had no way of knowing that.

"I don't care how long you will live as a dragon, or how skilled a mage you are, you're just a child here. Children should just act like children, no one here will take offence at that."

He didn't want her to like him.

But he couldn't ignore her.

Zagan roughly brushed a hand through her hair, as if he was assaulted by a haze that even he couldn't explain. Surprisingly however, Fol didn't shake his hand off. He had been prepared for her to snap at him in anger but... far from that...

"A child..."

For some reason, tears welled in her eyes.

Eh? Did? Did I make her cry?

He'd made a young girl — she may be a dragon, but she looked like a girl — cry. That flustered even Zagan.

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"H-hey, don't cry!"

"...I'm... not crying."
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Zagan was at a loss with the girl wiping at her face with both eyes as she spoke.

"Kuh, a-anyway, dinner's done, right? Let's go, Nephie's cooking will stop your crying."

Zagan took Valefar's hand and headed to the dining room, pretending not to notice her squeezing his hand back.



"Is it tasty, Fol?"

"Yeah, it is."

Valefar had finished crying as they arrived at the dining room. The three of them then took their lunch at the table. Zagan was sat in the middle, with Nephie on the left and Valefar on his right.

Despite everything, Valefar was sitting there as if she was familiar with everything.

She really is calculating.

Zagan was the one that had said she would stop crying if she ate, but he couldn't quite reconcile such a drastic change. He let out a sigh and moved his attention to her legs as they swayed, unable to reach the ground.

"What is it this time?"

Valefar suddenly cast her eyes down as Zagan looked at her suspiciously. It seemed she was scared again, but the girl mustered her courage and spoke.

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"...Zagan."
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[&]quot;What?"

[&]quot;...I'm sorry, for interrupting dinner before."

That would be the day she arrived. Zagan's eyes went wide at this.

"I interrupted, even though you were eating Nephie's food. Of course you would be angry."

"H-hmph, as long as you understand."

He hadn't thought she would apologise so honestly, and answered loudly to hide his confusion.

At the same time, he made a decision.

Well, it should be fine.

He didn't intend to create a mutually trusting relationship in a few days, but they should be able to co-operate. At least she should understand that there was nothing to gain by going against him, but things to gain by obeying him. Growing sure of that, Zagan looked at Nephie.

"More importantly, Nephie, I thought I might bring her along tomorrow, do you mind?"

"I don't, what do you need her for?"

"Hmm, I thought I'd go and investigate Marchosias' castle, the Demon Lord's Palace, again."

Marchosias' castle didn't have a set name, but mages called it the Demon Lord's Palace out of respect.

"The... previous Demon Lord's castle?"

"Yeah, I investigated it before, but the information I wanted wasn't in the books I brought back, so I'm going again."

What he wanted being descriptions of demons and the Demon Lord's Seal.

It's beyond strange to find nothing, even though I searched so much.

Marchosias must have wanted to stop the knowledge from spreading.

Valefar spoke warily.

"...Are you sane? This is the same as giving me the Grand Elder's knowledge."

Grand Elder was how Marchosias was known, having been called that name at

some point because of his life spanning over a millennium. Naturally, he would have amassed vast knowledge. If he investigated the area, he might be able to find hidden books. If Valefar, being a dragon, could gain that knowledge, she might even be able to surpass Zagan or another Demon Lord.

And yet, Zagan nodded as if it was nothing.

"I've already said, I don't care what knowledge you steal."

Valefar's face grew all the more confused.

"...I'm your enemy."

"Yeah, I suppose that's true. But well, I'm shorthanded, if you can at least help with my goal, I don't mind anything else you do."

In the past days, let alone attacking either him or Nephie, Valefar hadn't even been hostile, so having her help with the search through Marchosias' legacy shouldn't be an issue.

I did want to go alone with Nephie though.

But Valefar was a mage, and a dragon might have knowledge that others wouldn't. She would definitely be helpful in searching through Marchosias' legacy.

Besides, he honestly wanted someone that could deal with Marchosias' castle.

He didn't think Barbarus would give honest reports, and Nephie's friend Manuela wasn't a mage. Her other friend Chastel was a holy knight of the church. So he could just leave the management to Fol if she could use it. That was how much importance Zagan had put on finding out about the true nature of demons and the Demon Lord's Seal. Zagan then cleared his throat and muttered.

"Besides, following the Demon Lord shouldn't be a bad thing for you. Nearly everyone already knows not to oppose me, so, well, umm, you know..."

"...? What are you trying to say?"

Zagan answered while looking away from Valefar as she tilted her head at him.

"Whatever your true nature, there aren't that many fools that would displease me by laying a hand on you."

Just like Nephie, the title of Demon Lord would protect Valefar. There hadn't actually been any invaders since Valefar's attack. There might be lost people and holy knights, but no mages should publicly oppose him anymore.

Well, if I can't protect her, I can't say that I will protect Nephie forever.

He was just protecting her incidentally, it wasn't at all because he was worried about the young girl with nowhere to go. He said it wasn't, so it wasn't.

And yet, when he glanced at her, she didn't seem disbelieving, but was looking back and forwards between Zagan and Nephie. Slowly, Valefar nodded, as if she finally believed his words.

"I... understand."

"R-right."

Zagan nodded, and Valefar glared at him in dissatisfaction.

"...But, I'm not 'you'."

"Hmm? Ah, your name. Got it, come with me, Valefar."

However, Valefar moved her mouth to say something that seemed difficult, and then, after her mouth opened, she said.

"...Fol... is fine."

This was the first time that Vale— no, that Fol compromised with him. Zagan spoke again, scratching at his cheeks.

"Ahh... Then I'll count on you tomorrow... Fol."

"Got it."

Zagan and Nephie grew a little closer to the new lodger.



"...Honestly, falling asleep right after eating, kids are kids, dragon or not."

Zagan lay Fol on the guest room bed even as he cursed. During dinner, while they were all talking happily, Fol had fallen asleep still clutching her spoon. With

nothing else he could do, Zagan had carried her on his back.

Nephie had efficiently taken the robe off her and covered her with a sheet, hanging the robe so it wouldn't crease.

"I think she's tired. I'm sure it's the first time it's happened.

Zagan grimaced at Nephie's cheerful words.

"Isn't this enemy territory for her though? Even though she's sleeping so soundly?"

Fol herself had said that, but Nephie happily shook her head.

"You taught her that you weren't enemies didn't you?"

"Huh?"

Nephie's ears shook in happiness.

"She was very wary at first, and scared I think. But because she was reassured that it was okay, she's sleeping like this." She then looked up somewhat embarrassedly at Zagan. "I was the same."

He remembered the days when Nephie had first came here. He hadn't known how to speak with the girl he liked and dawn had broken while he was flustered. There hadn't been time to prepare a room for her like she now had, and she had slept curled on the throne room floor.

It seemed that Fol had let her guard down around Zagan that much now.

"W-well, that's because, you know. You're mine, you have to take care of your things."

"You do, thank you."

Nephie answered happily, even though he called her a 'thing' again. Remembering his embarrassment then and with Nephie's gaze now was far too embarrassing again, and he avoided her eyes.

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"Are you okay with this though?"
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"Am /?"

[&]quot;Bringing Fol, I didn't ask you at all, but..."

Nephie's eyes widened in surprise as he began his question, and her pointed ears stiffened, showing just how surprised she was. And then, her mouth curved into a slight smile.

"Yes, just as you wish, Zagan-sama."

"R-right."

Unable to calm down, his eyes fell on Fol.

"...Honestly, she's still holding that spoon?"

Fol was sound asleep, with the spoon still clutched in her hand. Zagan took it from her.

And it was at that moment.

"O-oi..."

For some reason, Fol was holding on to Zagan's finger.

She's soft.

Her hand was different from Nephie's slender digits, it was childish and chubby. And then she murmured something, sounding lonely.

"Father..."

She was probably dreaming of her parents. She was speaking feebly, unthinkable for a dragon that had aimed for Zagan's life. He didn't know what kind of relationship dragons had with their parents, but she seemed to be remembering hers. And her sleep talking really did sound like that of a young girl.

I'm bad with kids...

Zagan didn't know what parents were like.

Perhaps his intent to be like a sibling had reminded her of her father, and he actually felt saddened that he might seem that old. However, he couldn't shake off the hand holding his thin fingers. At this, Nephie had a rare smile.

"What is it?"

"Nothing, it's just... It's sort of like we have a child, isn't it?"

A-a-a-a child?

This was different from Zagan calling her a kid, it would mean that it was his child, with him and Nephie as her parents.

A child! Even though we haven't even kissed!?

Let alone sex, they were still only holding hands. Nephie seemed to realise what she had said at Zagan's expression, and her face flushed red in an instant.

"T-that's not what I mean! Um, just that you were protecting her, and protecting a child was like..."

"Ah, r-right. I-I get it. I get it alright? Don't worry."

As sweat ran down their heads, neither of them could look the other in the eye. Then, Nephie grabbed Zagan's cuff and Zagan intertwined his fingers with hers, and she slowly gripped back.

What is this, it's sort of... warm...

Being held be Fol on his right hand, and Nephie on his left was strangely comfortable.

"Family."

That was probably the word Nephie wanted to say. Of course they knew about it, there were words that showed those relationships, sibling, spouse, breadwinner. However, neither of them knew what it really was. So they couldn't put it into words right away.

The first thing that the word family would bring to mind would be a child holding hands with their parents. It hadn't happened to him, but he had seen it in the town.

I wonder if we will be able to be like that.

Being a mage was synonymous with being a villain. It might be funny for him, who stood at the pinnacle of mages to wish for ordinary happiness, but Zagan had what he wanted.

And then, he vowed to protect it. It might be a meagre desire for a Demon Lord, but the sight of family seemed to shine to Zagan.



It was the next day, and Zagan was leading Nephie and Fol through the town of Kianoides. The Demon Lord's Palace was hidden under the city. The Grand Elder's castle was an underground labyrinth.

However, he didn't immediately return there, and was walking through the streets.

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"Zagan, where are we going?"

"A clothes shop."

"Why?"
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"Are you going to walk around in that?"

Nephie was in her usual attendant's outfit, but Fol was in the same robe as always, and so had only underwear on beneath it. Perhaps because of that, she was looking around restlessly.

I'd like to at least hide her horns too.

They were currently covered by a low hood, but a gust of wind would expose them, a hat or something would be better. Despite that, she looked up at him in dissatisfaction.

"You were the one that told me to leave my armour."

"Of course I did, people would even run away from Nephie if you were walking around in that."

Nephie was well liked amongst the townspeople, and there were a fair few people that would talk with her. Driving people away from her wasn't what Zagan wanted.

However, Nephie was the one that was uneasy then.

"Umm, when you say clothes shop...?"

"Indeed, her shop is familiar, so it's fine."

"I think Manuela is good too, but, um, will the clothes... be alright?"

Nephie's expression remained blank as always, but her ears meant her

confusion was evident.

Fol tilted her head at their reactions.

"Is she a mage?"

"No, she's a normal person. A kind person too."

"Is she ...?"

Nephie's words lacked persuasiveness, and Fol clutched Zagan's robe in fear.

Nephie was friends with her, but she was an eccentric that often used Nephie as a dress-up doll. It was troubling when she gave her clothes she couldn't look Zagan in the eye while wearing, but she was reliable for whether clothing was good or bad.

Besides, even if she notices that Fol is a dragon, she shouldn't say anything.

Her thinking of Nephie as a friend was something that meant Zagan could trust her, and he spoke reassuringly.

"Even she wouldn't make a kid like this wear weird clothes, would she?"

"...I... wonder."

Nephie, don't be so nervous about that.

Even Zagan worried if they were really friends. Whilst that was going on, they reached the store in question.

"Welcome!"

An energetic voice greeted them when they opened the door. The greeter was a beautiful, green-winged woman, smiling cheerfully as she wandered the store.

She was twenty, and was Manuela.

Nephie bobbed her head in greeting.

"Hello, Manuela-san."

"You came again today, Nephie-chan?"

"Yes, umm, I wanted you to choose some clothes..."

"Of course... Wait, why is your master here?"

Her eyes finally fell on Zagan, and she looked at him as if he was a great nuisance. Zagan looked sullenly back at her.

"Oi, you've been making Nephie wear weird things while I'm not here."

"What on Earth could you be talking about? I only choose our products."

"This shop has a mountain's worth of indecent clothes." Manuela whistled in faux ignorance at Zagan's glare. "...Honestly. Nephie isn't the customer today, choose her some suitable clothes."

Said Zagan, pushing Fol forwards.

"Oh, a new lodger? Let's see..."

Manuela softly removed the hood from Fol's head. Her green hair and golden eyes were exposed, and Manuela's eyes shone brightly.

"My...! She's cute."

"Uuu..."

Perhaps feeling that she would be hard to deal with, Fol went to hide behind Zagan, but Manuela caught her by the arm.

"Hmmm, there's something different about her than Nephie! Leave it to me, I'll make her really cute!"

"...Don't make her wear anything too strange."

"It'll be fine, it'll be fine."

Fol looked up searching for help, but Manuela pulled her away without mercy.

"...Will it really be fine?"

"Well, it should be, shouldn't it?"

Their gazes followed her as if she were their own child on their first outing, and they fiddled with the cuffs on their clothes.

After several minutes, the dressing room curtain opened.

When they watched Fol totter out, they both let out a breath. She was

wearing something that looked like a tribal dress of some country. It went with her green hair and was based around white and scarlet. While they were a subdued colour, her horns looked like ornaments and went together well with it. There was a robe hung on her shoulders.

"What do you think? The robe goes well with it and brings out her natural adorableness."

"...If you can do it properly, why don't you?"

The clothes were brilliantly chosen, but Zagan sighed. Manuela shook her head as if to say he didn't understand.

"Our job is to show our customers their new selves, isn't it?"

"Your choices are too new."

That aside, Zagan looked at Nephie.

"It suits her, doesn't it? What do you think, Fol?"

"...I don't know. Human clothes are all the same."

She said while checking how the hem sat, and her face didn't seem at all unhappy.

"Isn't it too eye-catching?"

"I don't really mind that."

If anything, she'd want to show she was with Zagan. That would inevitably decrease the number of people that would hurt her. At least when Nephie walked alone no one made a move on her.

However, Zagan muttered.

"But the hood doesn't fit with it."

Showing the horns would mean that someone might recognise Valefar as a dragon. They had to show that she was under Zagan's protection, but going as far as showing that she was a dragon might cause issues. What was also protecting Nephie, who would be targeted for being a white-haired elf, was that her personality was loved by the townspeople, which wouldn't necessarily be the case for Fol.

Wracking her mind, Manuela soon clapped her hands.

"In that case, what about this robe?"

So saying, she gently hung another robe over Valefar's shoulders. It was a pure white robe, inlaid with red decoration in parts, but the hood was like a cat costume, and the ears perfectly covered her horns.



"Hmm. Not bad. What do you think, Nephie?"

"It's very cute, I like it."

Said Nephie, with her ear tips shivering in happiness.

"Then it's decided, we'll take that."

"Thank you for your patronage!" Then, while she was removing the price tags, Manuela teasingly questioned them. "So, this girl... Fol-chan, right? Did you adopt her?"

"That's not it, but..." How should he explain it though? If he said she was a mage that attacked his castle, he would be too forgiving to Fol. Having said that, he didn't know what she was thinking, but what would calling her his adopted child do. As he worried, Zagan answered. "Right... umm, does it look like that?"

"Yeah. You look more like parent and child than siblings... Right, that's everything." Manuela fixed the cuffs after cutting the price tags off and stood up. Fol immediately hid herself behind Zagan, as if she had been released. "Well, I won't pry. As long as Nephie isn't unhappy, that's fine."

"Hmph, a wise decision."

He really wanted to thank her for her help, but that was the sentence that left his mouth. However, Manuela was used to it, and showed no sign of the ruined atmosphere with a tight smile.

"Come again any time then."

"We will, thank you, Manuela-san."

Valefar saw Nephie bob her head, and timidly imitated her.

"...Thank you. I... like the clothes."

Manuela smiled broadly at her response.

"Damn, you're so cute! I can keep her, right? Ah, that's not it here, it'd be you leaving her and going?"

"Hey, calm down! She's not a thing, don't be so thoughtless!"

Zagan took Fol's hand and hurriedly left the store.



"...Honestly, this is why it's such a hassle going to her store."

Nephie murmured happily as he walked angrily.

"But I think it was the right choice."

As she said that, Zagan looked at where he was leading Fol by the hand.

She was still unsteady on her feet, but it seemed she liked the clothes themselves. She didn't appear to dislike them and seemed rather happy in fact. She tilted her head, perhaps sensing his gaze.

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"What?"

"Nothing... Do you... like them?"

"Yeah."

She nodded surprisingly honestly.

"I see, that's good."

"Thank you too, Zagan."
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She was probably thanking him for paying for her clothes. She didn't smile, but spoke unenthusiastically. Then, Fol used her empty hand to hold Nephie's. They walked along as a trio, with Fol right in the middle, and Zagan's breath caught.

What's this feeling...?

It was strangely warm, and happy, not a bad feeling by any means, but it was an emotion he had never felt before.

He could possibly call it love.

But it was different from his love for Nephie — romantic love.

He remembered Manuela's earlier words.

"You look more like parent and child than siblings."

So would this be protectiveness? Zagan shook violently as he realised the truth of the emotions filling him.

Impossible... I want to protect a kid like this?

If someone like Barbarus found out that he still had those feelings, they would probably be seriously worried.

But Zagan, with his wicked appearance, hadn't had a chance to interact with children before. As he worried through a vague haze in his mind that he couldn't put into words, a girl walked from in front of him.

She was wearing a silk shirt and a skirt that was decorated with lace. Elegance flowed from her slow gait, and her long, red hair that fell to her waist showed her to be a young noblewoman. She seemed to be thinking of something, as her expression was downcast.

He had the feeling he knew her face, but couldn't immediately remember. Recently, he had had more chances to exchange a few words in the town, so there were several of those 'acquaintances', when the girl saw Zagan, her breath caught.

"Z-Zagan?"

It seemed that she knew him.

I recognise her voice too, who is she?

As he wondered, the girl relaxed as she saw Nephie, and then stiffened when she saw Fol.

"Y-you... you've already had a child...?"

"D-d-d-d-don't say such shameless things! Nephie and I haven't..."

When he took a glance at Nephie, the tips of her ears had gone red, and when their eyes met, they immediately looked away from each other.

What's Nephie thinking?

Even Zagan knew roughly how a child was born, but when she had asked for things like sleeping together, she hadn't really seemed to understand the implication.

Could he really lay his hands on the soft skin of the girl that didn't understand what night service was?

As Zagan worried himself, Fol looked up at him not following the situation.

"Zagan, who's that?"

"Hm, ah, that's right, who are you?"

He knew her from somewhere, but didn't really know. The girl and Nephie both looked at him in shock at his question.

"D-don't you even remember me?"

"Zagan-sama, Zagan-sama, it's Chastel-san!"

The girl's eyes immediately filled with tears and Nephie frantically told him. The girl's teary face finally matched with a 'Chastel' in his memories.

She wasn't wearing her armour, had no holy sword, and her red hair was down, so he didn't recognise her as the same person.

Well, she seems fine.

It was a concern that she wasn't dressed as a holy knight, but she seemed safe.

"Oh, it's you. Fol, this is... I suppose you could call her Nephie's friend?"

"You can."

When she saw Nephie nod, the girl — Chastel, finally calmed down.

Captain of the holy knights and Maiden of the Holy Sword were her titles. As the names implied, she wore the church's baptised armour and took on the responsibility of wielding one of only twelve holy swords.

...Well, she had the veneer of that.

"So, what's with that outfit?"

Chastel hesitated to answer Zagan's question.

"I'm um... off-duty right now."

"What, you weren't fired?"

"I-I wasn't!"

Chastel panicked as if he'd hit the nail on the head.

Mages and holy knights were antagonistic, but Zagan had helped Chastel before, and she had said she would vouch for him in the church. It was a disgraceful act for a holy knight, and it wouldn't be unthinkable for her to be excommunicated.

Chastel crossed her arms and looked away with a huff.

"I-it's not like I matter, is it? More importantly, what's with this girl? I doubt you kidnapped her, but..."

Zagan avoided her gaze and patted Fol on the head. It made the hood move, but didn't seem like it would expose her horns.

"She's a mage too. You can think what you like about our relationship."

"E-ehhh...?"

He didn't know what she was imagining with her confused face, but Zagan didn't care. As this happened, another voice came from afar.

"Lady Chastel! Walking alone is dangerous!"

"We beg of you, allow us to guard you!"

Three sweating knights rushed up. Zagan noticed them and stood to protect Chastel.

"Mgh, Zagan! What are you doing to Lady Chastel?"

Zagan nodded, able to remember their filth.

"Yeah, and you three are... The three... Morons of the Azure Sky?"

"We're the three Knights of the Azure Sky!"

"Whatever. You don't really have any business with...?" As he went to turn them away, a light of blood-lust was lit within Fol's eyes, and her arms now had the claws of a dragon. "Stop."

Fol shook in surprise at Zagan's low remonstration.

Have these idiots had some kind of argument with Fol?

If they saw her as a mage, they would be hostile, and imagine that he had recruited other mages. However, the knights didn't notice Fol's hostility and just glared at Zagan. When he thought of her form as 'Apparition', it was easy to see why they didn't connect them. Tiredly, Zagan waved a hand at the three knights.

"If you've got no business with me, leave. I'm busy."

At any rate, a conversation between the mage Zagan and holy knights in such a public space was not a good thing. Zagan wasn't particularly bothered by it, but it could end poorly for Chastel.

They seem like they're worried about something.

It was Chastel. However, if Zagan, a Demon Lord, were to offer his hand to a holy knight wielder like Chastel, rather than help her, it would become a source of misfortune.

The knights huffed.

"Regardless, we have no words to exchange with yourself."

"Let us go, Lady Chastel. Please think of your safety."

"Eh, a, wai-"

The knights took Chastel away without letting her get a word in. However, Zagan overheard their final words.

"Please think of your safety."

It seemed like she was in some kind of trouble again. Nephie seemed to have noticed it too, as her eyes were uneasy as she watched them leave.

"I wonder if Chastel-san is okay?"

"I wonder. But it seems like she has a decent amount of popularity, and there are people she can rely on."

The mage Zagan involving himself would only worsen her position. It would be a lie to say he didn't care, but he was also worried about Fol's glare at their backs."

"More importantly, Fol, did they do anything to you?"

"...Is there something strange about a mage disliking holy knights?"

"No? That's perfectly normal."

Apparently she didn't want to talk about it. Her arm had returned to normal, but she avoided a straight answer.

That was clearly hatred though.

It was fundamentally different than the hostility she had shown when she attacked Zagan's castle. If he had been the target of such hatred, even Zagan wouldn't have kept her nearby. He shrugged and looked to where they had left.

I hope this doesn't get annoying.

However, he didn't notice that he was already being protected from the 'annoyance' as he sighed.



"We're here, this is the Demon Lord's Palace."

Marchosias' castle was old, repaired ruins, in the same space as the underground auction hall he had met Nephie in.

It was mostly underground, but even so, the underground space was filled with shops to its furthest reaches, and the wall of the buried castle left a strong impression. There was a gate leading to the inside in the centre of the wall.

Zagan and Nephie had been there before, but it was the first time Fol had seen it and seemed to be overwhelmed by its scale as she leaned back. It did seem like she wasn't affected by the disagreement with the holy knights now.

"There's this kind of structure underground?"

"Yeah, it was originally above ground, then sank. I don't know if it was a fluctuation of the crust or Marchosias' magic that caused it though."

The castle itself was centuries old, so it was hard to find traces of magic. Though if an entire castle had sunk, there should have been records left behind, so it probably was Marchosias' magic. It was an amazing power, that Zagan couldn't imitate.

If I'd insisted on going my own way, would I have had to fight with those twelve monsters?

However, they would someday be an obstacle for him protecting Nephie and allowing her to live in the sun. As he once again went over those difficulties, Fol murmured softly.

"It's kind of familiar."

Zagan's eyes widened.

"Have you been here before?"

"No, just the place I used to live had a similar atmosphere."

"Really?"

Zagan crouched so his gaze was level with Fol's. The young dragon girl's eyes were round, but she nodded.

"Yeah. There wasn't a castle, but it was a similar kind of cave, and the smell was similar too."

"The ... smell?"

"The smell of magic. A dragon probably lived here in the past."

Those were words that he hadn't expected.

The ruins... of a dragon?

If that was the case, she might know things they hadn't investigated before, because even if she was young, Fol was a dragon.

"Right, tell me if there's anything related to dragons inside, I don't care how small it is."

"Got it. But if there are books I like, can I read them?"

"...I don't mind if you bring them back, read them later."

"Right."

He wondered if she really understood. Fol's cheeks flushed and she seemed somewhat happy. Was she excited at the traces of her brethren?

Right, those holy knights don't matter any more then?

Children's interests really did move quickly. Even with his amazement, Zagan opened the entrance to the castle, causing a blast of cold air filled with the smell of mildew and dust.

There weren't even any torches inside, and darkness lurked like it led to the underworld. There was a sense of tension in the air, as if the Demon Lord's mana still remained, even now.

Marchosias didn't have humans near him, and had familiars and golems take care of his needs. However, even they had either left with his death, or returned to the earth from whence they came. Therefore, there was no one that knew the full story of the castle.

Nephie held tightly to the cuff of Zagan's robe. Gently squeezing her hand, he walked inside. When he took a step inside, a magic circle sensed the return of its owner and lit candles set into the wall. The darkness was driven away like a ripple on the water, but on the contrary, the mana hanging in the air thickened.

"Zagan, what's that?"

Fol was pointing at a huge statue that was looking down at them.

"It's probably a type of creature made by magic, like a golem or a chimaera."

It could be called a survivor of those that managed the palace. It had completely turned to stone and they couldn't feel even traces of mana from it. Fol's eyes opened in surprise at his answer.

"A creature... it's alive?"

"It seems so. Unfortunately I don't know how to release it, or employ it."

There were bounded fields arrayed around the statue and though Zagan knew that they were there for something, he hadn't determined exactly what they were for.

"Could it be a guard?"

Asked Nephie, tilting her head.

"That's probably right. It looks like it stopped working when its original master, Marchosias, passed away. It might rampage if you touch it carelessly, so don't."

"R-right..."

Following Nephie's example, Fol grabbed Zagan's cuff as well. His face softened into a smile as if he wanted to sigh, as he looked over the hall.

There were strange jewels set into the stairs to the upper floor, and the passageways to the left and right were also lined with decorations. Even the

floor was covered in magic circles with so many circuits that the floor itself wasn't visible. He still hadn't grasped the full scope of the castle. It would take years to investigate everything and go through the entire library and all of the magic tools.

I really do want a subordinate.

Someone that could manage this castle and collect the information for Zagan.

But a mage that wouldn't betray him... or more importantly, would answer his demands was hard to find. Fol fulfilled those conditions, but whether she would accept it was another matter.

Zagan had many problems in his mind, but first walked towards the archives.

It was then that Fol spoke up.

"Zagan, is this magic circle good?"

She was pointing at a magic circle on the floor. It was delicately constructed, inlaid with crystals, and was about three or four paces in diameter. He was taken by how the farthest reaches of magic would be so beautiful.

"What do you mean by good?"

Fol spoke as if it was obvious when Zagan questioned her.

"This is a dragon's formula."

"What, really?"

"Yeah."

Apparently there were circuits only passed down by dragons. The circle and the magic's structure was no different than that which Zagan was used to.

If a Demon Lord lived for over a millennium, it wouldn't be strange for them to get skilled with dragon's formulae.

It was a power that he couldn't possibly hope to comprehend after a mere eighteen years. As Zagan was moved by the new reality becoming clear, Fol looked up at him somewhat proudly.

"Just like you said, I told you."

Her appearance was nothing like a vicious dragon, and Zagan stroked her hair.

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"You did, good girl, Fol."
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"Right."
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Her eyes closed slightly as if she was being tickled, and then she ran over to Nephie.

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"Nephie, Zagan praised me."
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"That's good, Fol."
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Nephie stoked her hair as well, and Fol let out a satisfied sigh. As he watched them, he felt the same feelings when he wanted to protect Nephie.

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I don't want to admit it, but is this protectiveness...?
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He had tried to deny it at first, but he had no choice but to admit it now. Even while he was confused at the change within himself, he asked Fol a question.

"Fol, do you know what this is for?"

"It's probably hiding a door or something."

A seal that even used dragon formulae? It was no wonder that he hadn't found anything big last time.

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"Can you open it?"
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"Yeah."

Fol touched the circle and started to investigate it. Zagan watched over her, and Nephie huddled in close with him.

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"What is it?"
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"It's nothing, just..."

Nephie mumbled strangely reluctantly as Zagan questioned her. It was like she was embarrassed, and her pointed ears flushed red. Then, she looked at him with upturned eyes, as if asking him to guess.

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Is she testing me, a Demon Lord...?
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To think that he would have such a test from Nephie. Zagan thought frantically.

Is she teasing me?

It was exceedingly rare that Nephie asserted herself like this, and he wanted to guess somehow. He then remembered Fol's satisfied face from just a moment ago. It was an easy to understand smile of a child, because she was praised by Zagan and Nephie.

But I try to praise Nephie as much as I can...

Of course, praise was difficult for Zagan, but he still tried to show those feelings as much as he could, and he felt that Nephie understood that.

So it's something else?

He didn't think it would be far removed from his conversation with Fol, and then remembered how Fol had closed her eyes in comfort.

I see, it's that!

Finally, he thought he had the answer and looked back at Nephie with a nervous expression.

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"Nephie."

"Y-yes..."

"Don't move, okay?"

"...?"
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She was bewildered to see Zagan seemed deep in thought, as if he was facing an unbeatable enemy, judging by his expression. Then, Zagan carefully reached a hand towards Nephie's face. A gulp came from her pale white throat, and then, he touched her soft, white hair.

The answer that Zagan had come to from Nephie's wordless plea was...

To stroke her hair.

Nephie let out a breath and closed her eyes in enjoyment.

I've had my hair stroked before as well.

When she had let him sleep on her lap, Nephie had stroked his hair, and it was the happiest moment in his life that far. However, he hadn't returned the

gesture, and it seemed that when she saw him stroke Fol's hair in front of her, she was somewhat jealous.

Nephie's ears shivered in satisfaction and she leaned against Zagan.

This... isn't really bad.

He didn't put it into words, but those were his thoughts. Nephie hadn't behaved like this while they were alone, perhaps Fol also being with them had put some kind of desire into Nephie's heart.

It was a dramatic change from when they had first met and she had given up on life.

"…"

His face relaxed at those feelings, and he noticed that Fol had been staring steadily at them. They sprung away from each other.

"W-what is it, Fol?"

"It's open."

Looking in front of the young girl, there was a gaping entrance to stairs that lead even further down.

"Right, good job!"

Quickly, Zagan descended the stairs.



The hidden stairs did indeed lead to a huge library. The ceiling was a whole floor above, and bookcases reached as high as the eye could see throughout the room. Of course, the walls were buried in bookcases too.

A cursory glance showed tens of thousands of books that would take more than a decade to read. There were, of course, many old books stored within the archives, and there were handmade documents as well. Books that Marchosias had collected over more than a millennium.

Zagan looked at Fol.

"Well done, Fol, it looks like this is it."

There might be other hidden rooms, but this was right in the entranceway sealed using even dragon formulae. It would have been frequently used so there was a high possibility the room was important.

Zagan turned to Nephie and Fol.

"Gather up all of the books which mention demons or the Demon Lord's seal."

Even if there was nothing close to the core of the matter, if he could gather related circuits, he would be able to see the full picture. It was always worth it for a mage to read.

Nephie lifted the sides of her skirt and bowed.

"Right away."

He had told her what she needed to know last time, so she should be used to finding things from the title and contents. Next to her, Fol looked up at him as if she was expecting something.

"...Well, I don't mind you bringing books you're interested in too."

"Right!"

Fol nodded and they headed in their own directions. Zagan went to investigate the shelves.

A library of this size should have even more things like hidden stairs.

It was common for a mage's hideout to have things like mechanisms in the bookcases which would cause stairs to appear. With how large the room was, nothing was immediately visible and he might have to investigate the furthest areas.

He walked around as he skimmed over the spines and happened upon Fol again, apparently they were searching through the same bookcase.

She looked up at him and tilted her head.

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"You look happy, Zagan."
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"Do I?"

"Yeah."

With it pointed out to him, Zagan touched his own face. He didn't know if he was smiling or anything, but now that she mentioned it, he might have a pleased expression.

"Well, there are so many books all together, it does put you in a good mood."

"I get that."

Surprisingly, Fol agreed.

"I... don't dislike reading books."

"I see."

He could imagine the small girl tottering around with a heavy book. He wasn't Manuela, but he couldn't help but smile slightly. Fol then looked up at him unhappily and asked him a question.

"Zagan, can you read minds?"

"...? I wonder about that."

He didn't understand the meaning of her question, and gave an indirect answer, then Fol looked oddly earnest.

"You knew what Nephie wanted even though she didn't speak."

She probably meant when he stroked her hair earlier. It being mentioned again like this made him want to die of embarrassment and scratched his nose to hide that.

"Nephie is always guessing for me, so if I couldn't get at least a little, I'd be in trouble."

She had inferred everything and returned even when he hurt her and turned her away, so he wanted to live up to that.

Fol looked down in some kind of loneliness at his answer.

"I'm a little... jealous."

Zagan frowned in puzzlement.

"Why are you talking about it like it has nothing to do with you?"

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"Eh...?"
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"I don't know how long dragons live, but Marchosias lived for a thousand years." Fol looked blankly up at him as if she didn't know what he wanted to say, and Zagan avoided her gaze. "After a millennium, you should be able to infer things without words."

Of course, Nephie would be there too. Zagan was currently hurrying to gather knowledge to live freely for millennia.

Fol looked up at him in disbelief.

"Will you... go with me...?"

"I won't stop you from going where you want."

"It's here."

Said Fol, clinging to his arm.

This doesn't really work...

But still, he gave up and stroked Fol's head. Though he wouldn't always do it. As they searched through the books with Fol still clinging to his arm when she suddenly looked up at him.

"What is..."

Fol took out a book, and her face suddenly grew serious.

The title was *The Twelve Holy Swords*, and holy swords were a natural enemy of mages, this was a book with information on them.

Fol was flipping through the pages when Zagan let out a gasp.

"Give that for a second."

"Uuuh..."

Fol glared and groaned, but he didn't have the time to worry about that.

The book had copies of the symbols engraved on the sword. Zagan then dropped his gaze to his right hand.

It is!

Visually comparing them, the Demon Lord's Seal had a lot of similar characteristics to the crests on the holy swords.

It wasn't enough to say they resembled each other, but there were many portions which showed that the characters had the same source. Because of the lack of similarity, he hadn't realised it when he met Chastel, and she didn't have the holy sword earlier either. However, he was sure of it when he compared it to his memories.

So if I investigate the holy swords, I'll also find out about the Demon Lord's Seal.

If they were the same type of crest, then learning about one of them should let him understand the other.

He returned the book to Fol.

"Good job, Fol. Gather up books on holy swords, I'll investigate too."

"...Right!"

Fol was probably interested in them because she hated holy knights or someone related. But her voice was still thick with anticipation and joy. They told Nephie and the three found several books on the holy swords.

Chapter 3 — I Don't Want to Get Involved with a Holy Knight's Circumstances

"It is an honour to meet you, Captain Raphael Hurandel, I am Chastel Lillqvist."

They were in the cathedral of the Kianoides branch of the church, and Chastel was introducing herself with a bow as Zagan and the others were searching the Demon Lord's Palace.

With her rights as a holy knight suspended, Chastel was denied not only her holy sword, but her baptised armour as well. While she had changed into formal wear since meeting the others, she was still nothing more than an ordinary, human girl. Her three subordinates were arrayed behind her as usual. The holy knight before her didn't seem aged, and instead had an intense feeling of intimidation surrounding him.

The first thing to draw the eye was the gouge from his cheek to his forehead. His white hair was cropped short, and his dark-blue eyes seemed to shine with a light that pierced through the object of his gaze. His huge body seemed to be constrained by his baptised armour. He had a pronounced jaw, and a finely chiselled nose, coupled with a brutal expression that would cause the weak-willed to faint.

He carried a large blade on his back.

A holy sword.

The twelve holy swords all had the same form. In other words, it should be the same as the blade that Chastel was bestowed with, but it seemed like a one-handed sword.

This was Raphael, the one that boasted the most mage-kills at four hundred and ninety-nine, a symbol of the church's might.

The knights behind her could do nothing but stare rigidly up at him. However, there were no others around him.

The Captain is alone, without a guard...?

Precisely because he was the church's greatest asset in battle, the Captain must be protected. The holy knight captains like Chastel fought on the front lines in subjugations of mages, but they had subordinates to protect them.

And yet, Raphael had come here alone. He was certainly powerful, but Chastel felt that his actions were rash.

Raphael looked her over from her head to her toes and smiled, smiled like the cracks running over a mountain-face.

"So you are the rumoured 'Maiden of the Holy Sword'? I had heard you were serving your penitence for acting contrary to the church, but you have an unexpectedly good look about you."

Apparently her acting contrary to the church — protecting Zagan — hadn't been spread. It was most likely Cardinal Clavell's consideration towards her.

"Your words honour me."

Chastel quietly returned, and Raphael let a breath out through his nose.

"How many mages have you cut down?"

Chastel's lips pursed at that being his first question.

"...I do not think it is a number to boast of."

"Mmm..."

Raphael's eyes narrowed overpoweringly.



"L-Lady Chastel, please mind your choice of words!"

"Even with our worthless lives as a shield, we can only protect you so far."

"You are disgraceful. We swore to throw down our lives for Lady Chastel!"

The three knights cried out quietly, but were quelled with a shudder when Raphael looked steadily between them.

Is he offended?

He was the knight that had killed the most mages, and most likely wouldn't hesitate to cut down those that sided with an apostate. Speaking honestly, Chastel had resolved herself to perhaps even losing her head today.

Now that she thought of it, she may have been wandering the town despite needing to greet him because she wanted to talk to someone one last time.

And I could meet Zagan and Nephie there, it was more than I could hope for.

...Well, she had burst into tears at his lack of remembrance.

Regardless of this, Raphael actually seemed to be entertained by Chastel's stubbornness and burst into a hearty laugh.

"Ha ha ha! It's been a while since one could talk like that before me. You might even be the first woman to do so. What a delight. You can boast of that honour in the underworld."

The atmosphere seemed to tear.

It came to this...!

While she had a ceremonial sword, Chastel was as good as unarmed without her holy sword. Nothing more than a bug to be squashed underfoot by Raphael.

"U-uwaaah, please flee, Lady Chastel!"

The three knights leapt forward, but they were powerless before this titan.

It was at that moment.

"Lord Raphael, what are you doing to my knights!?"

The old Cardinal was the one rebuking the titanic knight. Footsteps from the Cardinal's office within the cathedral rang out.

"Hmph, Clavell? I have no use for men who are nothing apart from on paper."

"You may have no use for me, but it is my duty to protect my knights. You will

know that you cannot do as you wish here."

Tears welled up in Chastel's eyes at those reliable words. Raphael glared back at him without respect.

"More importantly. You are depriving her of her holy sword, correct?"

"It is not a deprivation, it is merely being held in custody."

"It's the same thing. Where is it?"

Clavell looked dangerously back at him.

"...And what will you do once you know that?"

"Exactly what you'd think. A sword has value because it is swung, what meaning is there in keeping it as a decoration in its scabbard?"

Clavell spoke quietly, searching for the meaning behind his words.

"Are you saying to return it to Chastel?"

"I won't go so far as to say it. A holy sword chooses its own wielder. As long as that wielder still lives, none other can use it." Here, he stared steadily at Chastel to punctuate his words. "As long as she isn't hanged that is."

Clavell backed off at Raphael's smile that seemed to say it was a duty he would be delighted to undertake himself.

"What a repulsive suggestion!"

Clavell crossed himself and glared at him, but Raphael just retorted without a sign of chastisement.

"What are you scared about? It's the truth is it not? Besides, you clergy have no right to speak of how wielders use their blade, you just need to think of the cleanup."

If they were accepted by a holy sword, all kinds of atrocities would be affirmed.

This is the Terrifying Holy Knight Captain...

Scolding herself for her weakness and hesitance, Chastel stepped out in front of Raphael.

"You go too far, Lord Raphael. If we wielders were to use our blades as we wished, we would be nothing more than common thugs."

Her hands shook in fear. She tightened her fists and glared at him.

"My, to scold me not only once, but twice in fact." Raphael murmured in apparent joy and then turned back to the Cardinal. "And so, Clavell? The knight you are to protect will lose her life here and now."

"Kuh..."

Raphael might actually do so, and the Cardinal groaned.

But why is he making sure I have my holy sword?

If her execution was his goal, he could just cut her down here. He already had the moral grounds to.

Then does he intend to play with an opponent that can resist?

She didn't want to think that a holy sword would choose such a man, but she couldn't think of anything else.

"...I understand. Chastel, come with me."

A red carpet lay behind the door, and several doors were lined up at its sides where clergy and holy knights performed their duties. There was a door flanked by statues modelled on angels, with two knights standing guard.

Of course, neither Raphael or the three knights had followed them. After he made sure of that, Clavell murmured to Chastel.

"I myself do not know if it is right to return the holy sword to you. It may be just to give him a pretext to cut you down."

"...I understand."

She didn't know his true intentions, but it wouldn't be something Chastel could face without her blade. It might be to show that Clavell had seized her sword, and so she had something to defend herself.

They finally reached the angel door, and the guards stopped their path.

"Your Excellency, what do you require?"

"The time has come to return Chastel's holy sword, make way if you would."

The guards looked at each other, but soon separated. He was the chief executive here, so there was no one that would impede him. The cardinal moved forward, and the guards once stood again in Chastel's way.

"You wait here."

It was an act that would have usually warranted rudeness, but Chastel waited obediently. Before long, Clavell returned with a sword.

"I believe that you can cut through your problems by your own hand."

He said and once more handed over the holy sword to Chastel.



It was night time, in a tavern within Kianoides.

"Heehyahya! You adopted? Seriously?"

The coarse laughter was coming from Barbarus. After he had obtained the new books from the Demon Lord's Palace, Zagan had been called out by him and gone right back to the town.

I wonder if Nephie and Fol are finished eating...

He had told Nephie that he didn't need dinner after Barbarus had called him. He kept asking himself if there was a reason to have sacrificed their dinner together and come here as Barbarus guffawed.

Of course, Zagan answered that dangerously.

"...Why do you know that?"

"Gehahaha, Zagan, look in a mirror. A guy like you taking a lost lookin' brat along, people are on about it being a kidnapping!"

He didn't know how far it had spread, but apparently Zagan walking with Fol around the town had become a rumour throughout Kianoides.

Well, that'll make fewer people target her...

There were none that would both know of Zagan and willingly invite his displeasure. If there were, they would be mostly confined to the church's holy

knights, but they weren't so foolish as to attack him without preparation. It would be enough to spread that Fol was under his protection.

Apparently, that was why Barbarus had called him out, to ascertain how true those rumours were.

"...Can I leave?"

"Oi, oi, don't be so cold. I'm goin' out of my way to get you that tasty booze you wanted, right? There's no harm in chattin' over a drink and some snacks."

It seemed that Barbarus had already enjoyed himself before Zagan had arrived, and his face was flushed from the alcohol as he threw an arm around Zagan's shoulders.

That aside, the drinks were tasty.

It was the first time Zagan had tasted brandy over ice, and the burning sensation in his throat mixed with its mellow sweetness and made him let out an unintentional sigh.

I wonder if Nephie can drink.

If he was going to be drinking, he'd rather do so with her loveliness rather than Barbarus' dourness, and he decided to bring a bottle back with him.

He came back to himself at that and jostled Barbarus' over-familiar arm off of his shoulder.

"...You're an annoyance. And bring it to the castle next time, I'm busy looking after my apprentice."

"Hah, that's right, you're screwing that slave elf."

"I-I'm not screwing her!"

"Huh?"

Barbarus stuck a finger in his nose and frowned at him.

Can I just punch him and leave?

Barbarus paid no heed to the cold gaze and slapped him on the shoulder again.

"So, about that brat? You ain't one for sacrifices, right? So's she a treasured slave? Or you gonna tell me she's another apprentice?"

"...Well, she should be someone you know."

"What? So she's a mage? And a woman?" Barbarus folded his arms and fell into thought. "Well, Seductress Gomory'd be the one to think of? But she's apparently a real man hater, and ain't a little girl. So, there's also..."

Zagan relaxed as he watched Barbarus nod to himself.

If he still

hasn't noticed, then no one should realise Fol is Valefar, and a dragon.

It was only a matter of time before Fol was known as a dragon. And seeing her magic... or rather her dragonification, would let people know that she was Valefar. That was unavoidable, but it was still too early. There were still enemies.

Zagan was already well known as a Demon Lord, and there weren't many that would attack him without making sure of that. Just as he had aimed for, mages and holy knights alike shouldn't think that it was worth tangling with him.

But even so, it wasn't perfect. There were still those watching for any slip-ups he made as a new Demon Lord. There were mages with enough power for that, and it would take more time before they gave up. They had to weigh their lives against the title of Demon Lord and the attraction of their legacy.

I might need something else.

Something to make all mages not want to challenge him. Because Zagan had two things he absolutely must protect in Nephie and Fol.

As he thought that, Barbarus made a noise of understanding.

"That's right, Valefar!"

Zagan ground to a halt.

Has he realised who Fol is?

Then, he feigned calm and tilted his head.

"What are you talking about?"

"Just, you got attacked by Valefar, right? That big masked guy."

"...Yeah, I suppose I did." Apparently, he'd gotten used to Fol's current appearance and forgotten they were the same person. "What about it?"

Barbarus made a bored face at Zagan's questioning.

"You gotta remember it at least. He's apparently gone missing, but what happened to him, you deal with him?"

"Who knows. You know how I deal with intruders after all."

Zagan answered evasively, and Barbarus looked up at the ceiling.

"Ach, what a waste. Apparently, he might be a dragon, even his corpse'd make for a good catalyst."

It was because there were people like this that he had to hide Fol's identity.

Zagan nodded in apparent disinterest.

"Yeah, I had heard about that now that you mention it."

"What the hell, you tossed him out even though you knew that? I'll ask in case, is he dead?"

"He might be alive if he's lucky."

He answered with as cool an expression as he could, and Barbarus clicked his tongue and backed off.

He then muttered into his tankard of ale.

"So the same as normal? Whatever, rather than Valefar, who's that brat you were dragging 'round?"

He's not saying he knows, right...?

Zagan resisted a grimace at his exact answer as he shrugged.

"...Who knows. Just think of her as an adopted kid."

"Gehyahya! You adopted... a little girl... puhahaha!"

...He's hopeless.

He began to seriously consider hitting Barbarus as he rolled around with tears

coming from his eyes.

Suddenly, Barbarus' expression became serious.

"Well, let's leave the jokes there."

"...Finally getting to the actual reason?"

Even Barbarus didn't have the time to call Zagan out for idle chatter.

"There's a troublesome guy coming to the church apparently. Thought I'd tell you about him."

"A troublesome guy?"

"A holy sword wielder. Not like the girl from before, a way worse guy."

So a holy sword wielder other than Chastel had arrived.

Zagan let out a sigh.

"If they're moving the holy swords, the church itself is moving. Think they're aiming to take out a new Demon Lord?"

The antagonism between the church and mages was a matter of millennia. Of course, over that time, Demon Lords and the holy swords had clashed many times.

However, even though there were records of the swords removing a Demon Lord. There were none of them being defeated.

So whilst holy swords were a deterrent, they weren't able to kill Demon Lords. That was the common understanding between mages and the church. It was only natural that the church wished to overthrow this status quo.

However, Barbarus had a conflicted expression.

"I wonder about him. That new captain's pretty suspicious. He's the monster with the most mage-kills after all."

"...He's not so peaceful."

"Right. I don't know what he hates so much about us, but he's already killed four hundred and ninety-nine mages, it ends up as killing a mage every three days. And he's chosen you for his five-hundredth celebration!"

Even Zagan frowned at that unusual amount. The church's announcements might be a little exaggerated, but Barbarus wasn't the type of person to use those numbers.

Zagan looked down in thought.

"That's odd. Even though he's a holy sword wielder, could he kill five hundred alone?"

They were all called mages, but that category could contain everything from novices that only had power, to Demon Lord Candidates, and the difference between the two was Heaven and Earth.

If a Demon Lord candidate had ten-thousand 'circuits', a novice would have around one hundred. Even killing a hundred novices would lead to getting utterly destroyed by a Demon Lord Candidate. With five hundred, he had probably fought against a Candidate once or twice.

Going further, even amongst the candidates, Barbarus had over twenty thousand circuits. And in pure skill, Zagan was above even him.

Chastel hadn't revealed everything in their fight, but even so, he didn't think she would escape unscathed from fighting a Demon Lord Candidate.

Does he have some secret weapon, other than the holy sword?

Barbarus put down his tankard and smiled as he pondered.

"And, apparently he killed a dragon and ate it."

Zagan couldn't help but rise. "Is that true?"

"Yeah. The church don't approve of preying on dragons, so it's unofficial info, but he did kill one. If he got its power, killing five hundred mages ain't unthinkable."

Shit, it's him.

Zagan cursed mentally.

"...Is there something strange about a mage disliking holy knights?"

Fol had some kind of grudge against holy knights. And since they had met, she had had an unnatural desire for power for a mage or dragon. And here came a

dragon-killing holy knight.

It still wasn't certain, but he couldn't believe his luck was good enough that they were unrelated. Then, he glared at Barbarus.

"You're being pretty open today."

"Well, I came here to apologise and give my tribute. Joining together with you'd be better than bein' at odds."

"...Have some shame."

With a wince, he poured brandy into Zagan's glass.

"I'm pretty capable, right? It ain't bad for you either."

"If you were that admirable, maybe I'd trust you a little... So, what do you want?"

Zagan asked with a tilt of his brandy.

"Will you let me manage the legacy of the Grand Elder? He lived more than a thousand years, even calling it a legacy don't do it justice. You ain't going to be able to manage it on your own, are you?"

He had been uncomfortably close to what Barbarus wanted, and couldn't hide his grimace.

However, he didn't hesitate to answer.

"I refuse."

"The hell!?"

"...You'd just hide stuff you didn't want me to see."

"Obviously. Problem with that?"

Barbarus' eyes widened in surprise at Zagan saying that after all this time.

Why is he such an idiot if he's so clever...?

If anything, Zagan was uneasy.

"...Haah, I'll separate out some of the books, be satisfied with that."

"Well, that works. You're a generous friend."

So saying, Barbarus tapped his tankard to Zagan's glass and toasted alone.

Then, the atmosphere in the tavern stilled.

The door opened and a customer walked in. Barbarus had his back to the door and didn't notice him, and was still talking in high spirits.

"You'll let me choose which, right? Don't go givin' me the worst, even if it is part of the legacy!"

"...By the way, Barbarus."

"Aye?"

Zagan spoke as he raised his glass, looking over it to the figure of the newly arrived customer.

"That dragon-killer holy knight you were on about earlier, what's he look like?"

"Ahhh, I heard he's a huge geezer. Oh, and he's got a massive scar. Apparently, the dragon he killed gave it him."

"Oh...?" Zagan noised as he looked at the customer. He took another mouthful of brandy and then questioned tiredly. "And would that scar happen to go from his left cheek to his forehead?"

"Yeah, I heard that. You know him?"

"Just a coincidence. I've seen someone that looks like him."

"Oi, oi, your luck's sure somethin'. He lives for killing mages, you know? If your eyes meet, he'll cut you down."

Zagan looked beyond Barbarus as he guffawed.

"Seems he's here now."

"Huh...?"

Apparently, Barbarus had finally noticed his gaze and looked over his shoulder, and then his face drained of colour.

Standing there was a man, with a scarred face and a holy sword.

"Raphael Hurandel...!?"

Barbarus stood, knocking over his chair.

The scarred man didn't spare him a glance and looked directly down at Zagan.

Has he come for my head all of a sudden?

A holy sword's power would be a nuisance, but it would be arrogant to assume that he would be able to defeat a Demon Lord alone. A fool like that wouldn't have lived so long.

As Zagan frowned at not knowing what he was aiming for, Barbarus shouted aggressively.

"W-why are you here, you bastard!?"

The scarred man finally looked at Barbarus, and craggy face split into a smile. Its implied violence was enough to make the waitress that was unlucky enough to be behind Barbarus to swoon. That was how penetrating the gaze was, even without directly meeting his eyes.

The smile felt like a physical weight and Barbarus cried out in resolve.

"U-uoooooh, let's go!"

Barbarus' hands shone with mana and the scarred man put a hand on his blade.

"Stop, Barbarus."

Spoke Zagan quietly as he placed his glass down with a clunk.

Suddenly, the mana spouting from his hands vanished. He hadn't stopped it, Zagan had 'devoured' it. Then he waved a finger through the air and the chair that Barbarus had knocked over righted itself.

"Whatever, sit down. You'll ruin the taste."

"What are you so calm for!? You just gonna let him cut you down."

Zagan tiredly shook his head at Barbarus' cry which was a mix of fear and anger.

"...He's not exactly here to fight."

"Huh!? His hand's on his sword!"

"And you went to attack him, didn't you?"

The scarred man had readied his sword because Barbarus had started casting, and Zagan didn't miss that.

Besides, I can't feel any bloodthirstiness or hostility.

Both Nephie and Fol weren't particularly expressive. Actually, with Fol, it was less her expression, and more that she didn't talk enough. At any rate, there were many things you couldn't tell from just looking at their faces so Zagan had made a habit of guessing what they were thinking, or what they wanted from the subtle signs.

The scarred man's smile was like a gash in the earth.

"Seems like this Demon Lord is pretty calm."

"A Demon Lord wouldn't get upset about the little issues."

Though he said that, Zagan couldn't hide his unease. He looked at the seat he had raised back up using magic. Barbarus probably didn't feel like going back to drinking, and even when the knight took his hand from his sword, he didn't sit down.

"Seems like there's a seat free, want to sit?"

"Oh... You're an interesting man."

His scarred face twisted as he sat opposite Zagan, and Barbarus backed away as if to avoid him.

Anyway, you speak. I haven't spoken to a rough guy like this, you know?

He had gone with the flow and invited him to sit, but that wasn't really his aim. Besides, he'd lost his time with Nephie, so he at least wanted to enjoy the drink. And yet, as if to deny his involvement, Barbarus was retreating, and then...

"Damn it, why does a mage like me have to do this?"

"M-mister mage, can you help my girl?"

"No idea. Healing magic ain't my thing, but I'll do what I can."

"Ohh... that's Zagan-sama's retinue for you."

"I ain't his retinue!"

Even as he cursed at the man that looked like a barkeeper, he started tending to the waitress that had fainted earlier. She had only lost consciousness, so he didn't think he'd have to use magic.

I'd like to go join him...

Nephie was the only girl in his heart, but it went without saying which he'd prefer between a craggy man like this and the waitress.

Regardless, just glaring at Barbarus wouldn't solve anything and he finally turned back to the holy knight.

"So, what did you want with me, dragon-killer?"

"It's Raphael," answered the scarred man — Raphael — as he poured brandy into a glass. The bottle seemed like a miniature in his large hand. "I heard about you from my comrade, and came to pay my respects face to face."

That would be Chastel. Zagan shrugged carelessly.

"And I suppose my face is nothing to yours?"

"Fuhaha, as wicked a face as rumoured."

He knew himself that he had a wicked face, but he still slumped slightly. To distract from that, he tilted his glass towards Raphael.

"I heard killing mages was your hobby, taking a break today? There are two right in front of you after all."

Zagan nonchalantly involved Barbarus as he made to leave after finishing with his nursing. He'd put a hand on the door, but sullenly returned.



Raphael downed his brandy and smiled boldly.

"Foolish, it's just that prevention is better than a cure. That would just cause a

commotion in the area."

At this, Zagan's head tilted.

Huh, apparently Barbarus was wrong.

He was a maniac that had killed nearly five hundred mages. Zagan had been prepared for him to gleefully go to cut him down, but they were surprisingly able to have a proper conversation.

Maybe he had come to judge Zagan's strength. As Zagan pondered, he raised his glass to his lips, and now Raphael spoke.

"You fought with Chastel, why did you not kill her?"

Zagan felt uncomfortable at his words and furrowed his brow.

"You say it like she didn't have a chance."

Chastel might not have matched up well against him, but he wouldn't allow himself the conceit to say that a holy sword wielder couldn't match up with a mage. Zagan wasn't a Demon Lord then either.

Raphael let out a huff through his nose before returning.

"Then I shall ask this instead. Was she strong enough to fight against you?"

"I wonder... Well, I think she's about the strongest person I've fought against."

She had been caught by Barbarus, but Zagan had never actually seen her wield her sword seriously. She and Barbarus had fought, but if it was an upfront fight, he was doubtful that Barbarus would beat her. Raphael's eyes narrowed into blades at that answer.

"I see. Then she will be a threat to the 'church'."

"...? I can't see where you're coming from, what did you say?"

It sounded like he was calling her an enemy of the church.

"She objected against the elimination of a Demon Lord. That's enough reason for the church to execute her. They even temporarily seized her holy sword... It's foolishness, a holy sword cannot be inherited as long as its wielder isn't killed."

Zagan's eyes opened at this.

She's too careless!

She should have acted in accordance with her situation, and had been foolishly honest. And even protected Zagan.

He cradled his head and let out a deep sigh.

"...I thought she wouldn't live long."

"Truly. She's been warned, but won't listen at all."

Raphael said, somewhat sympathetically.

Zagan's eyes then flew open in shock.

Is he planning to kill Chastel?

If killing mages was his hobby, then it stood to reason he would execute holy knights that covered for them.

Zagan finally felt like he had understood why he didn't feel bloodthirsty when he came here.

He came to check how we were related.

In other words, for the justification to kill Chastel.

It wasn't Zagan that had the relationship with her, but Nephie. It wouldn't be strange for his words to be taken like that though.

He let out a sigh of defeat.

Raphael stood.

"I have no further business with you so I shall be leaving."

"...Wait."

Zagan felt his voice chill.

"What?"

Raphael looked back at him with a gaze that promised death with a single misstep.

"Chastel is fairly liked in this town. She has friends, and a fair few that would

grieve for her." Nephie and Manuela would certainly do so. And so, Zagan declared forcefully. "This town is my territory. Act out too much and I'll ruin you."

It had nothing to do with her being with the church or a holy knight. Chastel lived in Kianoides, so she was his. If she was arbitrarily killed, Zagan would crush them. That was Zagan's protection.

The reason he didn't do so now was the multitude of patrons acting as 'human shields', enjoying their drinks. The second was that though he could easily repair the building, people weren't so easy to heal.

However, those were reasons he didn't *want* to fight, they weren't reasons he *couldn't* fight.

It's annoying to hit through a shield.

Raphael's eyes opened in surprise, as if he had understood the meaning behind those words.

"I wouldn't have thought a Demon Lord would say that?"

"It's precisely because I'm a Demon Lord, it's my pride."

Raphael laughed heartily at the answer.

"Hahaha, you're just as I hoped. This is it, that 'evil' that drives the church into a frenzy."

It wasn't blood-lust that he could feel from Raphael, but exultation.

So he doesn't even think of mages as human.

It was the same as a hunter. A person didn't feel blood-lust or enmity towards their prey, just the thrill of the hunt. Raphael left the tavern with a smile that seemed to invite him to attack at will. Released from the tension, the patrons let out a breath.

With a sidelong glance to Barbarus as he slumped into his seat, Zagan murmured.

"...I don't like him."

"A mage wouldn't like a holy knight. Shouldn't you go kill him?"

Zagan let out a little sigh at Barbarus' aggravation.

"...Guess so. Off you go then, Barbarus."

His mouth dropped open in shock.

"You tellin' me to go die?"

"Nah, it's true that I want you to die though, don't misunderstand me."

"You want me to die?"

"I told you not to misunderstand me, didn't I? I want you to check on Chastel."

Barbarus' title was 'Purgatory'. Purgatory was said to be a place between heaven and hell, a place born of magic between dimensions. His title was due to his ability to freely enter and exit that place.

His technique when kidnapping Nephie and Chastel, his easy overriding of Zagan's transportation magic, Barbarus was a mage that excelled at transportation and summoning magics. Hiding himself and watching over Chastel would be nothing to him.

That's how he managed to summon the demon.

Zagan would struggle greatly to imitate that even now. He could possibly manage it by borrowing the power of the Demon Lord's Seal.

And yet, Barbarus looked frankly displeased.

"Hah? Why me?"

"I'll pay you back, so just go."

Barbarus looked surprised.

"Are you seriously going to save a holy knight?"

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Besides, don't you think it'd be funny having a holy sword wielder owe us?"

"Kch, you'll definitely regret this."

Even as he cursed, he didn't refuse. He continued on, sinking into his own shadow, transporting himself to his namesake of 'purgatory', and then to

Chastel.

Then, Zagan sighed.

"...He left without paying the tab."

Zagan was the one to tell him to go, but he felt like he'd been cheated somehow.



When he arrived back at the castle, it was already time for the day to change.

I wonder if they're already asleep.

Nephie woke up early, so staying up so late would affect her the next day, but it was still somewhat saddening to not hear her greet him as he arrived.

If he just wanted to see her, he could peek into her room, but it was on the highest floor, and the noise of him climbing the stairs might wake her so he walked as quietly as he could to the throne room...

"Welcome back, Zagan-sama."

Nephie was waiting in her nightclothes in front of the throne.

"Nephie, you're still awake?"

As Zagan's eyes widened, Nephie held her finger to her lips, shushing him.

Now that he looked, he could see Fol dozing in her lap. Apparently, they had both waited for him to return.

"You could have just gone to sleep first, you know?"

Zagan said, and Nephie smiled wryly at him.

"Fol insisted on waiting for you."

And she herself had fallen asleep while doing so. Zagan's face naturally softened at this.

"And she attacked me for the Demon Lord's power before."

"You were the one that kept her nearby, weren't you?"

Nephie gently stroked Fol's hair as she spoke, and the girl stirred slightly.

Zagan slowly sat down next to them.

"Right... What did you have for dinner?"

He wanted to hide after asking that right after returning, but Nephie nodded quietly.

"We left it at lamb stew and salad."

"Ah, that soup. It's a shame I missed it."

"There's still some left. Shall I heat it up?"

"Hmm... No, I'm fine for now, Fol's sleeping as well."

Seeing Fol sleeping peacefully, he didn't feel like waking her up so Nephie could serve him soup. He'd just warm it himself later. For some reason, Nephie covered her mouth. Her expression didn't change much, as usual, but her ears perking let him know she was happy.

"Fol worked hard. She took all the books into your library."

"There were a fair few, weren't there?"

"Yes, but she wanted to read them quickly, so she made sure you could read them right away."

He imagined her tottering to and from the library with books and let out a happy sigh.

Is this what having a family is like...

It felt like he would forget he was a mage and a villain. Then, Nephie's deep blue eyes faced him.

"Zagan-sama, did something happen with Fol?"

"Eh? I don't think anything really did, no?"

Fol wasn't good at showing her emotions, but he didn't think he had made her sad or angry. He tilted his head as Nephie looked affectionately at Fol's sleeping face.

"She seemed really happy today, you may not have realised it, but you probably made her happy."

Made her happy... he didn't know about that, but he remembered their conversation, and after thinking for a while, remembered her looking happy for an instant.

"Ahh, maybe it was that?"

"Do you have an idea?"

"I don't think it was anything big, but I said that we'd be able to tell what each of us wanted after a millennium together."

Nephie blinked blankly, then let out some stifled laughter.

"Anyone would be happy if you told them that."

"Why?"

Nephie softly leaned against Zagan's shoulder as he spoke in confusion.

"I think Fol was happy because it was like saying 'be with me for a millennium'. After all, dragons live longer than humans, and saying that while knowing so..."

Zagan finally felt like he understood. Mythical dragons were said to be able to live for tens of thousands of years. A human lifespan wouldn't even cover the childhood of a dragon. It was hard to find something that could live with them.

Actually, that might be why her resentment for killing her parents is so strong.

An older dragon spending its offspring's childhood with it might be different, but would the pain of losing a parent while you needed them be the same for a dragon as a human, or even stronger.

I really do need to deal with Raphael soon.

If she and the man met, it might even devolve into all-out war with the church. That would push them far from his objective to allow Nephie to live under the sun. As he worried, Nephie murmured sadly.

"I wish we could be together for so long, but..."

At that, Zagan's eyes widened.

"What are you talking about? Of course I'll be with you."

Elves, while not on the level of dragons, were a long-lived species. With the power of magic as well, a millennium would be nothing. In that sense, it would be Zagan that would have to put the most effort into lengthening his life.

Nephie's deep-blue eyes wavered, and she nodded deeply.

"Right! I'll be with you through it all, Zagan-sama."

He was taken aback. Before he had realised it, Nephie had grown close enough that the tip of her nose almost touched him.

Uwah... I didn't know her eyelashes were so long, and she smells so nice!

Changing into her nightwear must mean that she had had a bath, so this would be the smell of soap. Her hair was still damp and was cold, but soft. Nephie seemed to have realised their position too and went red from the tips of her ears to her cheeks.

"Nephie..."

As he whispered her name, Nephie's eyes swam. His gaze was drawn down to her peach-coloured lips, and he gently put a hand on her cheek.

"Ah..."

His cheeks heated at her gasping sigh. He thought she'd let him. He touched her snow-white skin, and moved forwards.

Their lips were about to touch.

"Oi, Zagan! This is bad!"

A magic circle shone in the middle of the room, and the clueless voice of Barbarus echoed out.

Zagan and Nephie sprang apart.

"Oi, at least reply. You... huh?"

Zagan slowly stood and moved in front of Barbarus, his eyes lacking any hint of mercy.

"Come up, Barbarus, I'll turn you into mincemeat."

"What you angry for?"

Zagan was really going to kill him, but then saw 'someone else' as he lifted from the circle and stopped.

"Chastel?"

"You were the one that told me to check on her..."

Barbarus was holding the holy knight. Contrary to their meeting that afternoon, she was wearing her armour and sword. However, her face was pallid and her breath rough.

She didn't seem to be wounded, but wasn't in a good state. Zagan touched her neck and forehead to check her condition.

Her pulse is high, but she's awfully cold.

That quickly made the cause clear to him.

"Poison."

"Probably, looks like it was in her drink."

Zagan looked back at Nephie.

"Nephie, I'll treat her, help me."

"Y-yes."

She didn't seem to know what was going on, but Nephie quickly and gently put Fol on the floor and stood up. Of course, that woke Fol.

"...Zagan, you're noisy."

"My bad, you can just sleep."

Zagan gave a quick answer to Fol as she rubbed at her eyes and mumbled. Then, Fol took a deep sniff.

"Huh ...? That 'smell' ... "

Her eyes then moved to the holy sword on Chastel's back.

Ah, damn it.

When Zagan noticed, Fol's golden eyes were filled with blood-lust.

"A holy knight!"

Fol's arm turned into that of a dragon. She may be a young dragon, but her claws would still rend through steel, and would rank similarly in their destructive nature to Zagan's fists when he used magic.

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"Wha? O-oi, Zagan!"
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Barbarus cried out as Fol's claws stabbed forth.

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"Stop, Fol!"
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Zagan somehow grabbed her arm and the wicked claws were stopped on the verge of touching Chastel's forehead. Fol glared up at him.

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"Why did you stop me?"
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"She's my guest, don't just kill her."

Fol's eyes became disappointed at that.

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"...Right."
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She looked like he had betrayed her. It hurt to see such an expression on a little girl's face, a little girl that had waited until now for him.

Chastel's condition was a race against time, but he couldn't just leave Fol like that.

He didn't think that he, a mage, could save anyone, but even so, Fol had become someone he wanted to protect.

"Do you hate holy knights?" he asked quietly.

"...You've probably already noticed. I became a mage to take revenge on holy knights."

Just as Zagan was looking at Fol, she was looking at him.

There's no way of avoiding this then.

Zagan nodded in resignation.

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"Is she your enemy?"
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"A holy sword wielder killed my father."

"They did, but it wasn't her, was it?"

Fol's fists tightened, and Zagan earnestly pleaded with her.

"Okay, Fol, indiscriminately taking revenge is a beginner's mistake. Killing her won't hurt your enemy. It will just give you more enemies, enemies that will be more things in the way of your revenge."

"What do you know?"

Zagan shook his head at Fol as she spoke with a voice shaking with anger and irritation.

"That's why I'm saying you're a beginner. That's not what revenge is, is it?" He looked at her with a stern, yet affectionate, fatherly gaze.

"Revenge is making them suffer, beating them down into fear and despair, so they beg for death, right?"

At that, it wasn't just Barbarus that was aghast, but Fol as well.

Zagan continued disinterestedly.

"And then once you're satisfied, kill them. Just immediately killing them won't make you feel better. That kind of brief revenge won't help you."

She probably realised that he was being serious, a bead of sweat ran down her cheek.

"...Have you taken vengeance, Zagan?"

"Yes, but I just killed them straight away. Just killing them didn't make me feel any better... So, I'm telling you how to do it properly, Fol."

The previous owner of this castle had taken Zagan to use as a sacrifice. He had been tortured to raise his effectiveness as a sacrifice, and after that had taken advantage of an opening and killed him, but he hadn't been able to relax after surviving that, and hadn't felt a sense of victory, and just felt listless.

I should have made him suffer before I killed him.

He knew how to do things properly now, and there were still torture implements in the castle. He could understand Fol's desire for revenge. That vigour had maybe overwhelmed her and she nodded jerkily.

Fol's dragonified arm returned to that of a human.

"...Are you really okay telling your adopted daughter that?"

Barbarus looked at him in shock, but he had no time to worry about that.



"Huh...?"

When she opened her eyes, she was greeted by an unfamiliar ceiling. It was made of old-looking stone bricks, but they were by no means dirty, and were clearly well cared for. It seemed to still be night-time outside, and the room was lit by a flickering candle.

Where on Earth was she?

As Chastel lay in confusion, she heard a voice from next to her.

"So you're awake."

"Za...gan...?"

He was a mage with a wicked expression, but a somehow languid gaze. That gaze seemed far softer than the one that she knew, but she was sure it was her imagination. He didn't look at her, and kept his eyes on a thick book.



"Make sure you thank Nephie, she treated you."

"Treated..."

Her head was still fuzzy, and she couldn't think properly.

Did I lose to someone...?

In which case, she should have been fighting for someone. She looked around and saw a large sword standing next to the bed. It was her holy sword, unstained by blood or battle.

Zagan couldn't miss her confusion and spoke.

"You were poisoned, I don't know the details myself."

At those words, she remembered something.

That's right, I was given a written summons.

"The symbiotic faction...?"

That was what the man that had summoned Chastel called himself part of. He kept himself hidden, not showing himself. That was for both of them But still, she thought he was also a holy knight. His voice didn't particularly match that. It was calm, like an ancient sage's voice. It wasn't at all a voice that fit with someone taking up arms and killing mages. It was similar to Clavell's, but more tolerant.

He spoke quietly.

"The war against mages has raged for over a millennium, without end. We are a group that believes that the church should keep mages in check, but not kill them."

That was the first time she had heard such a thing, and Chastel was at a loss.

That was heresy. When Chastel said so, the man laughed leisurely.

"And what you have done is truly heresy."

She, a holy knight captain, had objected to the subjugation of a Demon Lord. If that couldn't be called heresy, what could?

The man then spoke to Chastel, who was lost for words.

"Won't you join us? You need protection after speaking out against the

church. We will protect you, and with your own protection as a holy sword wielder, we can move in public. It's not a bad deal."

With a man like Raphael here, Chastel didn't know what would become of her. She couldn't be picky if she wanted to live.

So is he one of Clavell's subordinates?

Clavell had said that he would try and save her, and he could potentially wield that kind of influence.

But, if I live, what should I do?

She couldn't see a future with the church. But as a holy knight, she was no longer allowed any other way of life. She had nowhere to return to.

The man spoke solemnly to Chastel, who couldn't answer.

"You do not need to answer immediately, but do not tarry overlong... I know, as proof of our trustworthiness, you may call this name if you ever require aid."

"Orobas."

That was the name the man spoke, and just remembering it made her body heat up.

She asked if that was the man's name, and the man had given a vague answer.

"You could say that it is, but also that it is not. You can think of it as the name of our head."

The head, to be called that, they would be a holy knight that was a captain, or close to being so, or around a cardinal in rank. However, Chastel had never heard the name Orobas within the church.

So is it the name of the organisation itself?

At any rate, it was clearly an important name to them.

"That name shall protect you in any kind of situation."

With those final words, the man's presence vanished.

Can I believe that...?

He was a strange man. She wanted to believe him, but if it was a trap, it might involve not just Chastel, but her subordinates as well.

When she returned to her room, there was tea readied for her. She should have been wary, but Chastel was in thought and forgot her doubts and drank it.

And then, when she returned to consciousness, she was here.

Chastel recited her experience.

I'm sure I've heard that man's voice before.

But she didn't know, and rather than not being able to remember, it seemed impossible.

She wondered if Zagan had been listening as he continued silently turning the pages of his book.

A while after Chastel had finished, Zagan spoke disinterestedly.

"Do you have any idea of who poisoned you?"

"Hmm... I wonder?"

Normally thinking, it would be Raphael. If Clavell hadn't interrupted, it wouldn't have seemed strange for Raphael to have killed her in that first meeting. He was the one that wanted to kill her the most now.

However, the church was an organisation that made enemies, poisoning someone wasn't strange. As far as 'ideas' went, there was an endless amount.

And yet, Zagan shook his head as if he was reading her mind.

"That man... Raphael? He doesn't seem the type."

"Why? Actually, how do you know Lord Raphael?"

Chastel's eyes widened, and Zagan let out a sigh.

"He got in the way of me enjoying a drink, he pissed me off a little."

Chastel was a target, and that horrifying man would even level his sword at Zagan.

"He's cut down nearly five hundred mages. He's the type that prefers just killing their target there and then rather than using tricks. Rather than poison you, he would execute you fairly with his sword. And apparently, he has a reason to."

"A reason...?"

She didn't really understand, but Zagan didn't seem likely to tell her. After a while of confusion, Zagan closed his book and stood.

"First of all, because you and Nephie are friends, we'll look after you until you recover at least. There aren't any morons that would pick a fight with me."

"Wa...it."

Chastel grabbed on to his robe as he turned his back on her.

"...What do you want?"

Chastel then spoke in a minuscule voice at his dissatisfied sounding voice.

"I wondered... if you would stay... with me for a while...?"

She sounded so weak for a holy knight captain.

But, she still doesn't know when to give in.

She should have known this day would come, but if she was actually killed by poison, she couldn't have avoided being helpless.

Zagan let out a disgusted sigh.

"...Ask Nephie for that kind of thing."

And then bluntly denied her. Of course he did. Even Chastel knew from their few meetings that he treasured Nephie from the bottom of his heart. Of course it would be too much to console her here.

However, for some reason, Zagan once more took his seat.

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"U-um...?"
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"I can't wake Nephie up at this time of night."

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"Uhhh, will you... stay?"
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"I'm just reading."

He didn't look up. But still, he didn't leave.

"...I'm sorry."

She felt pathetic.

What did I want...?

She'd probably wanted him to look at her. Or to stay with her as she left the church.

I don't think I can get in between them though.

Zagan and Nephie were both people she couldn't hate, she wanted to see them happy. Surely, she wanted to be involved with them.

But in what way, she herself didn't know. But still, having someone with her relaxed her more than she would think, and before she knew it, Chastel had fallen asleep.



"Why did it come to this!?"

It was the next day, and Chastel's angry voice sounded from the kitchen.

She had somehow been saved from the poison last night, and was able to get up in the morning and joined them for breakfast. She was then given a change of clothes, and that had angered her for some reason.

"It suits you, you know."

Nephie weakly consoled her. Chastel was wearing the same dress and apron outfit as Nephie. The clothes were Nephie's spares, so there was the comparison to a normal attendant.

"Kuh... I'm the Maiden of the Holy Sword, you know? Why do I have to play servant!?"

"Oi, watch yourself, not even you're allowed to insult Nephie."

Calling those clothes servant's clothes was calling Nephie a servant too, and Zagan wouldn't allow that. Chastel's eyes watered at his blunt remonstration.

"...I'm struggling right now, couldn't you at least be slightly kind?"

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"Don't act spoilt."
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It was Fol that said that, looking coldly at her.

She was staring at her from behind Zagan, but it couldn't be mistaken for friendliness. Fol had stopped thinking of revenge, but that didn't mean she accepted Chastel. Zagan had to be careful of this as well.

Chastel smiled kindly.

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"Ah, are you Zagan's adopted...?"
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"T-tail...?"
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Saying that, Fol quickly left the room.

Chastel fell to the ground at the astounding rejection.

"W-what did I do ...?"

"I'm sorry, Chastel-san. I'll speak to her later."

"...Uhh, you're so kind, Nephie."

Chastel made a face of salvation at Nephie's pitying words of consolation, even while Nephie was expressionless.

However, Zagan shook his head.

"No, leave her alone for now. She might pester you a little, but won't kill you."

"Do you think it's fine as long as she doesn't kill?"

Zagan looked seriously at Chastel's shocked expression.

"Her father was killed by a holy sword wielder."

"..."

Chastel had no words for that, and Zagan continued quietly.

"It's not as if you're responsible, but I can't explain that properly to the brat. I'll shelter you here, but understand that."

Having Chastel do menial work was also a form of compromise with Fol. She had left, but treating her like a guest of honour would just invite anger.

[&]quot;Don't just talk to me, tail-head."

Chastel hung her head, as if she felt responsible.

"...Then shouldn't I leave?"

"I already said, leave her for a while. She's got a lot of pride, it won't let her be too bad."

...That's what he thought.



It was an hour later.

"Heeee!?"

Chastel's scream echoed throughout the castle.

"...What is it this time?"

Zagan asked Chastel, who had fallen, pityingly.

"I-I was cleaning and a frog fell on my head..."

Now that he looked, a small frog was indeed resting on her head. It seemed like she had been mopping the floor when a frog had jumped in. It had only been an hour, but this was the third time the frog had appeared.

When that was combined with her teary expression, Zagan couldn't help but laugh.

"D-don't laugh! This isn't what you said."

It seemed like this was Fol.

"Ah, apparently this is what happens when you're harassed without using strength."

"Wasn't her pride going to stop her from harassing me?"

"She's the child she looks like. Well, it's understandable she'd do this."

It was much better than his childhood, so he had no intention of finding faults with everything. Chastel glared at him.

"...You're spoiling her a fair bit. I didn't think you were the type to raise a hand against a child, but I didn't think you'd be so soft with her."

"Am I really being so soft?"

"You are!"

Chastel nodded vigorously at his questioning. Zagan could do nothing but scratch his head and look away.

"When I first met her, I didn't realise she was a child and hit her hard, so I feel kind of guilty."

"You hit her... Wait a minute, so she was an enemy at first?"

"Well, yeah."

Zagan answered easily, and Chastel looked at him in astonishment.

"Why do you treat us differently even though we were both enemies!?"

"I didn't exactly hit you. I don't make a habit of hitting women."

"W-women..." Chastel's face was suffused with red for some reason at that answer. "T-then hit me too. I don't like pain, but I'll bear it!"

"...Oi, is that really your hobby?"

"N-no! That's not it, I just..."

Just what, he wondered as Chastel's face reddened further and she fell silent.

Looking at her, Zagan had a thought.

Her personal life really is worthless...

It was probably also because of Fol's pranks, but she could only open her mouth and stutter, and soon started to cry. Zagan couldn't think of anyone else that couldn't put what they wanted to words like that.

Besides, because Chastel kept knocking the bucket over and spilling the dirty water, the floor was dirtier than before she mopped. When he faced her as a holy knight, she was much more defined...

However, that worthlessness also relaxed him.

Now Fol shouldn't actually think to kill her.

She should be questioning herself as she kept on with these pranks. She didn't think that towards anything but holy sword wielders.

It was possible that Fol might forget her revenge against Chastel.

As he thought that, Zagan let out a hmph.

"I don't really get it, but are you feeling better?"

"Eh, ah... Were you... worried?"

If he wasn't, he wouldn't have had Barbarus observe her. But Zagan didn't have a personality that would let him admit that, and because he didn't feel the need, he shrugged.

"Who knows." He glared with that distraction. "More importantly, we need to think of how to deal with whoever poisoned you. There should at least be a motive?"

"...That's..."

Chastel's face stiffened, and her right hand closed and opened searchingly in the empty air.

At that action, Zagan looked to her back.

She doesn't have her holy sword.

Zagan had no intentions in that respect, but this was enemy territory to Chastel, with her being a holy knight. Fol was being obviously hostile as well, so leaving her method of self-defence was a poor plan, but she had still left her holy sword...

Her issues might be deeper routed than I thought.

She was a holy sword wielder that had relinquished their blade and was unable to grasp it. Even if she could, a broken-hearted wielder would be unable to cut a mage or a holy knight.

Zagan looked to the corridor and saw Fol peeping through at them.

Should I ask her to ease off a little?

He wasn't intending to keep her here forever, but he couldn't just abandon her in this situation. She needed time to recover, so he'd wait that long.

As time went on, even though they were light, Fol's pranks would grow more frequent, and Chastel's cries would become a daily feature of the castle.

Maybe this will end up with them getting along.

Whatever the method, something was clearly happening between Fol and Chastel.

After this had continued for several nights, Nephie's voice resounded through the castle without warning.

"Zagan-sama, it's awful, Fol is gone!"

Chapter 4 — Defeating Demons Anyway Really is Like a Holy Knight

"... Zagan is kind, but I need to get revenge with my own hand."

This was underneath Kianoides, the Demon Lord's Palace. Fol had sneaked out of the castle during the night, and travelled here.

While she had withdrawn, her feelings wouldn't be resolved without killing holy sword wielders.

Zagan and Nephie wouldn't forgive that.

It was hard to conceive of a friendship between a mage and a holy knight, but there was a friendliness between them. If she killed their friend, they wouldn't forgive her.

"...It was a nice place to be."

She had wanted to stay forever, to depend on Zagan after he had said they could be together for a millennium. That was the biggest reason that Fol hadn't acted immediately.

She was too young to follow through with her revenge. It had made her as alone as hatred. Zagan and Nephie had mercilessly buried that loneliness.

If she had been able to stay with them like that until she had grown, Fol might have even been able to forget her vengeance. And, as a target of vengeance, Chastel was... a bit of an odd girl.

Zagan had told her not to kill Chastel, so Fol had shown her resentment in the form of pranks. Of course, it made her angry with Zagan and Nephie, but she had no intention of stopping that much. Or perhaps that anger would make her point her holy sword at them, and Fol would be given permission to kill her.

Even though Fol had thought that, Chastel hadn't drawn her sword. On the contrary, she didn't even remain armed within Zagan's castle, and Zagan should have been her enemy. Yet despite that, every time Fol thought Chastel might resolve herself, she just cried and glared. Watching her made Fol herself slump,

and consider if taking revenge on a girl like that would just be nonsensical. It was possible that Zagan had predicted that Fol would come to feel that way that he hadn't said anything.

That was exactly why Fol was shocked at herself.

"I can't forget, the holy knights betrayed Wise Dragon Orobas."

Wise Dragon Orobas — That was Fol's father's name, the name of a great dragon that had lived for a thousand years. He was deeply intelligent, sometimes fierce, and sometimes warm, he had used his wisdom not only to guide Fol, but also humans.

Fol was proud of her father.

Then one day, humans calling themselves holy knights arrived. She didn't know what they had talked about, but her father had flown off with them on his back, and not returned.

After seven days had passed, Fol could wait no longer and took to the skies to search for him. What she had found was her father that had died with a holy sword thrust into him, and a fiendish looking man drinking his blood.

Even the Wise Dragon Orobas was easily felled by a fatal wound from a holy sword. Her father, who had endlessly shared his knowledge and power, had been betrayed by the holy knights.

She could not forget that.

She couldn't let her hatred be extinguished.

And yet, it had been far too comfortable with Zagan, and she felt like she might even forget her hatred towards Chastel, who was an enemy.

Is my vengeance so trivial?

It couldn't be.

With Fol's youth and strength, she probably wouldn't be able to kill all twelve holy sword wielders. Even so, she couldn't overlook a holy sword wielder before her eyes.

That was why Fol had come to the Demon Lord's Palace.

Here... there might be the power to kill even the holy sword wielders.

If she could obtain the Demon Lord's legacy, she could even win over a holy sword.

Even if it was betraying Zagan and Nephie, she couldn't stop now.

Then, in the instant she opened the entrance to the palace—

"Ohh, to think there was a castle in a place like this."

Fol whirled around and a man's form appeared from the darkness.

I was followed?

She had neglected to pay attention to her surroundings in her rush. And furthermore, the man had a large sword on his back.

Fol's eyes widened.

"A holy sword... wielder...!"

Even without seeing its inscription or the like, she could feel it in the mana on her skin. The 'scent' of the holy sword that killed her father. She hadn't thought that there was another other than the woman that Zagan had taken in.

The huge man let an amused smile onto his boorish face.

"What a young mage. You could tell even before I drew it?"

Then, Fol finally looked at his face.

"You're..."

It was without a doubt the face of the man that had drunk Orobas' blood.

"Hmph, who are you? I don't know any lasses like you."

She heard something snap in her head.

"Youuuuuu!"

Her arms and legs both dragonified in an instant, and green wings burst from her back. In her rage, she didn't even think of using magic, just of cutting him with her claws.

However, the man was far faster than Fol, and drew his sword.

"Ah..."

She let out a confused sound.

This... is a holy sword wielder...

He wasn't an opponent that could be faced without preparation unless you were a Demon Lord like Zagan. It was because she understood that that Fol had become a mage, but...

The engraved blade descended towards Fol's neck.

The last things to come to her mind were Zagan and Nephie's faces as they gently stroked her head.

"Zagan..."

She spoke his name imploringly, and screwed her eyes shut but the pain she feared never came.

Instead, she felt a pair of arms gently envelop her from behind. And then, a haughty voice spoke gently to her.

"I know I said you could do what you like, but let's not let you stay up so late."

"Eh...?"

It was Zagan's arm that had stopped the holy sword.



"Ohh... you could stop my blow, Demon Lord."

Zagan had stopped Raphael's holy sword with his bare hand... well, with a magic circle as a shield between the blade and his hand.

The blade was a pure white, with different symbols than magic used on its surface that were also subtly different to those on Chastel's holy sword.

Apparently, the holy swords each had different crests on them.

And so, the sword's inscription?

Zagan checked his own arm as he sharply surveyed the blade.

The skin hadn't been shredded or burnt like before, even though Raphael's slash had been much more powerful than Chastel's Even a holy sword cannot

cut through the Demon Lord's Seal.

With the same amount of power, Zagan had been cut originally, but his mana as a Demon Lord didn't seem to be cut through or reduced by the holy sword.

Though it's not particularly enjoyable to have to rely on tools.

Although, well, he could think of it as fair because Raphael himself was using a tool in the holy sword.

Even Raphael couldn't move the sword that Zagan had seized.

Fol, with draconic limbs and wings, spoke with a shaking voice from within Zagan's arms.

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"Zagan, how...?"
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"I had a convenient courier, and had him bring me here, because I thought you'd be here."

Zagan's legs were still within a dark shadow. It wasn't his magic.

"I ain't convenient, or a courier."

Barbarus spoke in dissatisfaction. He suddenly appeared from the shadows and backed away, as if he didn't want to be involved.

"I said I'd reward you, right? Don't complain."

Zagan had ordered him to observe Chastel. Mages followed their contracts, and even after he extracted Chastel, he had continued to follow the order so he had answered immediately when Zagan called him upon Fol's disappearance.

"Zagan-sama, is Fol safe?"

The shadow was still connected to his castle, and Zagan answered Nephie's worried voice as gently as he could.

"Fol's safe. I just need to take out the trash and I'll come back, you wait there."

"I understand."

She actually wanted to rush over, but she inferred that the problems hadn't been solved, and answered like that.

"...And, so. It's not appropriate for children to be out at this time of night. Time to go home."

He spoke in his usual haughty voice, and Fol shook her head.

"No, that's not it. I... betrayed you... so... why...?"

Ah, so that's it.

Zagan softly stroked Fol's head as tears swam in her eyes.

"I'd already told you, right? Don't worry about all the little things."

Fol buried her face into his chest at that answer. The wings vanished from her back, and her limbs returned to those of a human.

"I'm... sorry."

"I told you not to worry about the little things."

That's right, little things.

I'm glad... I made it...

If Zagan had been a little later, he would have lost her, compared to that, Fol sneaking off to come to the Demon Lord's Palace was nothing.

Finally, Zagan focused on Raphael.

"I told you before, right? That if you act out too much in my territory, I'll ruin you."

The wicked looking holy knight responded unexpectedly to those words.

"Fuha, a mage is protecting someone else?"

"She's not just someone else. She's my daughter."

And Raphael had taken his sword to Zagan's daughter.

There's no reason to let him live.

Nephie wasn't here, and he was Fol's enemy, or had at least harassed her, so he'd kill him. Raphael's eyes also seemed to narrow in acceptance.

"...I see, your daughter. That should be plenty reason then."

"That's right... Fol, get away a bit."

He pushed Fol behind himself and removed his hand from the holy sword.

Raphael didn't stumble and separated from him, readying his sword again.

However, Zagan frowned.

Even now, he has no blood-lust?

It wasn't that he had no will to fight, but Zagan couldn't feel any blood-lust from his sword. Did he really intend to fight like that?

"...I'll warn you now, if you don't resist lethally, you'll die."

"I'd rather not, but there's no choice I suppose. I do not intend to die here after all."

With that murmur, blood-lust finally rolled off Raphael.

"Answer me, holy sword Metatron."

At Raphael's call, the holy sword burst into a pallid-white flame.

"..."

He felt like he would let out a groan, but narrowly avoided it, feeling keenly that he really had only been playing around in the tavern.

Raphael hoisted the flaming holy sword and recited.

"These are the Flames of Purification, said to have defeated the former Demon Lords, and said to burn all evil. A power that only a true user of a holy sword may use."

That was why the holy swords chose their wielders.

This is the original power of a holy sword...!?

Heat unfurled in waves from the Flames of Purification.

The surge alone started to degrade his magic circles. Even if he cast new spells, the instant the circuits were formed, they would be destroyed.

An average mage would already be powerless, without even fighting.

"Oi, oi... What the hell's this."

The holy sword's power was much the same, but Raphael's blood-lust itself

would cause beasts of prey to flee, and even Barbarus was overwhelmed and retreated.

Fol spoke shakily from behind.

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"Zagan, why...?"
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Zagan had incited him to go all out, if Raphael had not taken him seriously, he would have been much easier to defeat.

Zagan spoke calmly.

"I said that I'd teach you about revenge, didn't I? Letting your opponent use all of their strength and then trampling them is one way to humiliate them and cause them to despair."

It was certainly an inhuman blood-lust, but if you were to ask Zagan if he was an unbeatable enemy, the answer would be no.

Besides, taking down a holy knight captain will be quite the feather in my cap.

There were no people that would be visibly hostile to Zagan, but there were still those that would slit his throat in the night. Taking a holy knight captain's head should be more than enough to stop them.

Zagan kicked at the floor.

The stone surface broke and he closed in on Raphael in a step.

"Ngh."

"Too slow."

Raphael had swung his sword, but Zagan stopped it with his right hand.

It was barehanded, and not even a fist.

The palm of Zagan's hand was covered in the glow of a magic circle made of condensed mana.

It was rather small, but the apparent lines of light were actually formed of symbols itself, circuits. There were over two thousand forming it. This was the circle that had stopped Raphael's first blow.

Even the Flames of Purification could not instantly burn through over two

thousand circuits.

I'll call it Heaven Scale I guess.

Zagan hadn't relied on his power as a Demon Lord. Holy swords even cut through magic, so Zagan had made this new spell to remove the issue of the holy swords.

However, even though it was advanced, it wasn't a spell with any special power. It was simply strong.

It was a spell that would be of no use to anyone but Zagan, as it took in not only an enemy's spells, but also the surrounding mana to strengthen itself.

It was just a simply strong magic circle, but...



With a clear clang, the holy sword bounced off it.

The shock was like hitting a lump of rock and an ordinary person's arms would

have shattered. However, Raphael did not drop the blade.

"Ohh, congratulations, you didn't drop your sword."

"Ngh..."

However, the Flames of Purification still burned. While Raphael had an anguished expression, he soon corrected his stance and held the sword in both hands before attacking again.

The holy sword descended straight down. The shining flames were dazzling, and seared white afterimages into Zagan's eyes. His pure skill at swordplay and the ability to burn through magic were a nuisance, and losing his sight would be lethal.

Zagan quickly drew his leg back and re-oriented his body. The white blade whipped past his nose and struck the ground.

The earth shuddered.

"Kya."

Fol gave a small cry and the flames rushed over the ground.

Raphael's strike had left a deep fissure in the ground, big enough to easily swallow something of Fol's size.

He's ridiculously strong.

Raphael was strengthened by both his baptised armour and his holy sword, and approached Zagan's strength, and Zagan was a mage that specialised in combat. He probably wouldn't match a Demon Lord in a contest of pure physical strength, but it was by no means unnatural for him to be able to slaughter average mages like this.

Even as he witnessed the church's power personally, Zagan's expression remained composed.

"I'd rather you didn't damage the place too much."

Zagan sharply approached and drilled his hand, covered in his Heaven Scale, up in a scooping motion. Raphael quickly interposed his sword between the attack and its target of his face, and blocked the Heaven Scale with its blade.

It rang with the dull impact.

"Fool, did you think such a swing wou-?"

Raphael's sneering expression warped. Regardless of defending against it perfectly, it had put him in the air, Heaven Scale threw the Holy Sword and Raphael away.

"Whoops, it's hard to regulate the strength..."

The holy sword fell under the classification of long sword, a sword with a wide reach. In exchange for the effective range it boasted, it wasn't suited for small movements, and getting in close cut its effectiveness in half.

Even though he stopped the initial blow, it was compounded not only by Heaven Scale's strength, but also by Zagan's approach. And yet, Zagan's strike had thrown him from close range.

Shifting his weight lower, Zagan gouged across the ground, and struck with the palm of his hand in another pushing motion. This time, Raphael had readied himself, and slashed two-handedly with his sword.

Heaven Scale and the holy sword collided.

Sparks flew, Heaven Scale broke, and the Flames of Purification were extinguished.

Apparently, Heaven Scale and the Flames of Purification were evenly matched.

"What?"

"Hmm, so three strikes is the limit."

Zagan muttered, unimpressed.

He had been able to have three exchanges with a holy sword. That was a great amount of power, but not enough. If there were two opponents, or three, it would be useless. It was a great result for an initial test, but far from complete.

Barbarus yelled as Zagan calmly evaluated his techniques efficacy.

"You moron! Now ain't the time to plan!"

Although his stance had fallen apart, Raphael still hadn't relinquished his holy sword.

Zagan let out a small sigh.

"I've told you before, haven't I? I can afford this."

With his stance broken, Raphael was already defenceless. And now that the Flames of Purification were extinguished, he could use other magic.

Faster than he could swing his sword, Zagan's left fist had already struck his torso.

His arm was already coiled in several magic circles that spun.

It was the spell he had used when defeating Barbarus. Even without Heaven Scale, Zagan could easily punch through baptised armour. He could feel the snaps of bones breaking, and that shock probably pierced through to his organs.

"Gah?"

Raphael coughed up blood and flew through the air, hitting against the gate into the Demon Lord's Palace, and falling through it, where he collapsed in the entrance hall.

This was the conclusion. Zagan had seized victory, but tilted his head in puzzlement.

"He was weak. Was that really the holy knight that killed nearly five hundred mages?"

Even the Terrifying Holy Knight Captain hadn't been able to scratch Zagan. In other words, it showed that the church had no resources to oppose a Demon Lord alone.

He glanced back at Fol.

The young dragon girl looked confused, but finally came to her senses and started clapping.

What is this? It's not bad... it feels pretty nice actually.

Zagan waved quietly back.

He had just crushed an eyesore, but Fol's envious gaze was somehow

pleasant, even though the gazes of the masses had never affected him before.

Zagan's expression softened in satisfaction, and Barbarus groaned with sweat running from his forehead.

"...You monster, you ain't even out of breath."

Well, that would be the normal reaction. Certainly, Raphael's sword would have overwhelmed Barbarus, but holy knights were different from mages. Once they took a fatal wound, that was the end of them.

When he had knocked Barbarus out, even though he had done the same, he was able to stand again after a while, but Raphael could no longer stand.

Or so it should have been...

"...I... see. Such... power."

Even as he coughed blood, Raphael was using his sword as a cane and standing up.

What the hell is he?

Zagan once again filled his hands with mana and readied himself.



A little while earlier.

"I... need to go too..."

It was probably because of Chastel that Fol had left.

She didn't think that she had done anything, but was together with her parent's enemies. Zagan should cast her out. Of course, she was grateful for the shelter, but hurting Fol through it made it meaningless.

Zagan had run to Fol's room at Nephie's call, and Chastel had gone to follow, but...

I hesitated... to hold my sword...

So she was later than them, and when she finally reached the room, Zagan had already gone.

"Nephie, where's Zagan...?"

"Zagan-sama has gone to fetch Fol."

The pale elf girl's lips were tight, and she was watching an unnatural shadow that spread out on the floor. Chastel remembered it. When she and Nephie were kidnapped by the mage called Barbarus, they were swallowed in an ominous shadow like this. It seemed like Zagan had used the same magic and chased after Fol.

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"Aren't... you going?"

"Zagan-sama ordered me to wait here."

So she couldn't follow apparently.

"Then, I'll..."

Chastel began speaking, but then halted.

I'll go, and do what?
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Even though the poison should have left her body, her legs were weak. Her baptised armour was at the side of the bed, but there was no time to put that on. Even with the holy sword at hand, Chastel had been poisoned in the Church.

Having said that, living under the protection of Zagan, who they had been hostile with until this point was far too good a situation.

Then what should Chastel wield her sword for?

She fell to the floor with a clatter.

"Are you okay? You're not ill again are..."

Nephie rushed over to support her.

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"No, I'm... fine..."
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"Are you...?"

As a matter of fact, she wasn't okay in the slightest. While Nephie was expressionless, her ears still quivered anxiously.

Chastel let out a small sigh.

"I don't know if I should say it at a time like this, but I'm a little jealous of you."

Nephie's eyes widened at the unexpected complaint. Chastel was surprised that she could notice her change.

She's more expressive than when we first met.

She was sure that was thanks to Zagan. Even to her, who had not been so close to them, they clearly had an affectionate relationship.

I'm jealous that you can love, and be loved, that you're allowed those relationships.

Maybe it was strange for her to think such of an enemy, but Chastel had wanted to be someone to ease his loneliness.

However, Nephie shook her had.

"Is that so? I'm actually jealous of you."

"...Ha ha, what can you be envious about with me?"

Chastel asked self-deprecatingly, and Nephie spoke to her, tightly gripping her skirt.

"Because you can run to Zagan-sama, can't you?"

Her words were filled with emotion.

"I can only wait here. Zagan-sama is exceedingly strong, but something might happen, he might not be able to convey himself to Fol either."

The person who went out might not understand the worries of the one left behind to wait. But Chastel wasn't 'left to wait'.

But what would I do if I went?

She couldn't say anything, and Nephie continued.

"I cannot stand by his side and comfort him, nor can I support him."

I wanted to do that, but...

For some reason, Chastel was awfully frustrated and shook her head.

"Are you telling me to do that? I'm an enemy. Shouldn't you just ignore his orders and go yourself!?"

Her voice roughened, and something fluffy, white, and soft brushed the sides

of her face.

"I cannot do that." It was Nephie. Chastel didn't know what she was thinking as she hugged Chastel to her chest. "My duty is to greet Zagan-sama with 'welcome home' as soon as he returns." She spoke, softly stroking her head. "When Zagan-sama is away, it is my duty to protect the castle."

That wasn't in the sense of protection in battle. It was protecting the easy atmosphere for the household's head to return to.

Chastel slumped as her head was stroked. If she spoke, it would be complaints. Even if she tried to resist it, with how exhausted she was, she could do nothing else.

"I didn't want to turn my sword on him..."

"You didn't."

Nephie nodded in agreement as she continued stroking Chastel's head.

"But, I'm... a holy knight..."

"You are."

She didn't speak positively or negatively, simply nodding. Chastel couldn't help but find Nephie's chest warm, and clung to her.

"It was because I said that I didn't want to fight that this happened."

"It was."

She had had her sword seized, and was watched over by a stronger holy knight, and was close to death from being poisoned.

Tears were flowing from her eyes, dirtying Nephie's nightwear. And yet Nephie showed no displeasure, and continued her agreements.

And so, she couldn't bear it, and shouted.

"I didn't want to defeat him. I wanted to fight alongside him!"

They were words a holy knight should never speak. Even a mage would scorn them, asking why they were being so convenient.

And yet, Nephie nodded praisingly.

"You understand, don't you?" When Chastel raised her face in disbelief, Nephie was looking at her with her usual expression. "Even when we first talked, you really understood that Zagan-sama was lonely."

That was when he had sent her away, and she had gathered with Chastel and Manuela.

Her ears quivered in both nostalgia, and slight sadness.

"I was really a little jealous, after all, I thought I was the only one that understood Zagan-sama."

When Chastel and Zagan first met, Chastel had been saved, but he hadn't asked for anything in return. Quite the opposite, she was doubtful he would admit he had saved her.



And yet, he had looked incredibly lonely. So much so that it seemed like he was the one that needed saving.

Nephie saved him.

She couldn't see even a shade of that in Zagan now. As opposed to Chastel, who had done nothing, Nephie had saved him, even though she was sent away.

Nephie pushed Chastel's fringe away and spoke.

"But I was just as happy. Happy that there were others that understood Zagan-sama."

Chastel couldn't help but look at her admiringly.

You grew strong.

Strong enough that it wasn't just Zagan she could say things like that to, but Chastel too.

Nephie patted her on the shoulder.

"Are you okay now?"

"Ah... Y-yeah."

She felt her face grow red at having been held for so long.

Then, she hesitantly asked a question.

"Were you... consoling me?"

It wasn't something that needed checking, but she really didn't have the conviction to ask if she could think that.

Nephie tilted her head blankly.

"I was... Um, did I not do so well?"

"That's not it, but why. Um, I'm an enemy of mages, aren't I?"

Over these past few days, she had taken meals with her, cleaned with her, and slept under the same roof, so even she wondered.

But at her root, was she not an 'enemy' to them?

Nephie looked at her in puzzlement.

"Well, we're friends aren't we?"

She thinks about me like that? I can't win.

At the same time, she wanted to protect the things that Nephie treasured together with her.

Chastel wiped her tears and stood.

"I'm sorry, I look pathetic."

"It's okay." Then, the corners of Nephie's lips lifted, it was still clumsy, but it was certainly a smile. "Easing Zagan-sama's worry is also my duty."

"He was worried, about me?"

"Yes, since the incident with Barbarus-sama, he has been rather worried."

Chastel doubted her ears.

"Even though he didn't remember my face even?"

"That's not the case. At least that's how it looks to me."

If Nephie said so, it had to be the case.

She was no longer lost.

"Thank you. I'm going now."

She had nothing to lose now.

Then my last act should at least be my own.

He might not need her, but Chastel wanted to do so.

So she stepped into the shadow.

She didn't have her baptised armour, but her holy sword was in her hand.

"Stay safe, Chastel-san."

Chastel vanished into the shadow, watched over by the girl that called her a friend.



The following was once again within the Demon Lord's Palace.

Regardless of his baptised armour being smashed, and of the deep wound, Raphael had stood again. Zagan watched him alertly.

It's... not magic. Is this a power he obtained from a dragon?

If it was magic, Zagan would be able to 'consume' it, and holy knights hated magic, so it didn't seem likely.

A holy knight that could stand after such a wound truly would be a mage's worst nightmare. It would be tough for even a Demon Lord candidate to defeat him.

However, Zagan smiled happily.

"This is good, Fol. He won't just die. Think up what punishments you want to give him."

"...Right."

Fol's breath caught, but she soon nodded with anger.

Raphael quietly watched her. It might be his imagination, but it seemed to Zagan that held a tinge of pity and grief.

He spoke heavily, almost like he was sighing.

"It seems you hate me a fair amount."

"You laid a hand on my daughter. Besides, you killed about five hundred mages yourself, right? It's a bit much to say you don't want to be hated."

"Is that your reason?"

Raphael looked at Fol.

She grit her teeth and glared back at him.

"The Wise Dragon Orobas, that's the name of the dragon you killed."

It was the first time Zagan had heard her say that name.

That's a legendary dragon, his name is in books and legends.

To compare them to mages, it would be like Marchosias' elevated position amongst the Demon Lords. He hadn't thought that Fol would be the child of such a dragon.

However, Zagan had his doubts.

Could a legendary dragon be killed with this level of power?

Of course, Raphael had reached the limits of human power. He only seemed

weak because Zagan was simply too strong as a mage. Average mages and humans would need thousands of troops.

However, Raphael had

stood up from a blow from Zagan, but that should be because of what he obtained for consuming a dragon. The order of things contradicted it.

He didn't think he was someone that could stand against that level of power.

At Orobas' name, Raphael's eyes widened.

"...I see, you're Orobas' child."

He spoke in a somehow tired voice.

He drew his holy sword from the ground and held it in his hands.

"Then I shall have to kill you!"

Raphael brandished the blade and charged at Fol.

"You think I'll let you?"

Zagan punched him in the face.

An average mage's skull would have been pulverised with the strength behind the attack. The huge holy knight took that blow head on, and his head snapped backwards.

It certainly hit. Zagan could feel his jaw bone break. The jaw had many nerves beginning at the teeth, and because of the structure of the skull, that would cause a huge shock to the brain.

Mage, holy knight, or dragon, no one would stand after that.

I don't know what you're thinking, but I'll neutralise you for now.

Raphael would then fall and hit the ground head-first, or so he should.

"Nghn!"

Somehow, Raphael twisted his body and landed on his feet.

It was an unthinkable movement considering his body was so large that even Zagan had to look up at him. More than that, he had overcome the pain.

"What?"

Then, he sped past Zagan even faster. Zagan was sure that he had ended things, so couldn't react in time.

Fol was there, completely defenceless after reverting to human form.

"Don't underestimate me!"

Fol's hands were filled with a spell.

"Don't, Fol!"

Zagan shouted to restrain her, but Fol fired the magic at Raphael.

I won't make it.

It was at the instant that he thought so.

A sharp ringing echoed through the air as blade met blade.

A white ring of shock spread out from the two clashing holy swords. The ring of light spread throughout the cavern like ripples on a lake, entering the Demon Lord's Palace before vanishing.

Yes, another holy sword had been swung.

"...Won't you cease this, Lord Raphael?"

It was Chastel, who had appeared from somewhere that stopped that sword.

"Ah, crap, I forgot to close the shadow."

Muttered Barbarus without shame.

Apparently, she had crossed the shadow while Zagan had been fighting. Something had probably happened before that, as her eyes were rimmed in red and the tip of her nose had also reddened.

That said, she hadn't had time to put on her baptised armour, and while she had her holy sword, she was wearing an ultramarine shirt and skirt. She had stopped the holy knight captain's blow with just her holy sword, without even the protection of her baptised armour.

That was certainly an impressive feat, but that wasn't what had surprised Zagan, nor was it that she was here at all.

She stopped Raphael's sword and Fol's magic at once.

Fol had cast magic at Raphael, and the magic which should have pierced through him had vanished.

It hadn't destabilised, it had been crushed.

This was an aptitude that she hadn't shown when she fought with Zagan.

"What... are you doing?"

Fol growled and glared at Chastel. As she held Raphael's sword off, Chastel answered with a strained voice.

"You've only bullied me, but it was me that intruded upon your life. Can't we talk before we fight?"

She spoke firmly, like her worthless behaviour at the castle was an utter lie.

Something must have gotten through to her.

There was no hesitation or fear in her stance. With nothing else he could do, Zagan approached Fol and patted her on the head.

"Well, you'll have that conversation soon... but wait a little first."

"Why?"

Zagan was not looking at Chastel, but at Raphael.

"There's something I want to ask him first, though he probably can't talk with his jaw broken."

Zagan's punch had definitely broken his jaw. It had started to heal, but he still couldn't use his mouth. It was admirable he could still grip his sword and run around.

As if he had finally used up all of his strength, Raphael fell to his knees. It had probably been all Chastel could do to block the blow, and she fell to the ground as well.

Damnit, Raphael, your blood thirst vanished again.

It happened when he went to attack Fol. On top of that, Zagan's blow had indeed given him a grievous wound. Even if Chastel hadn't interfered, he

wouldn't have had the strength to cut Fol down. Fol had been named as one of the Demon Lord candidates after all. That was why Zagan had tried to stop Fol.

He stood in front of Raphael.

"I am a bad person, a mage won't think anything of torturing a holy knight. But beating on an opponent that doesn't want to kill is unpleasant. What are you trying to do, talk."

It wasn't like he had any compassion or pity for the man, and had no intention of becoming friendly with him.

However, something offended him.

The man was fighting as if...

"Killing someone that's essentially asking for it isn't satisfying."

At those words, Fol's eyes widened.

"What ...?"

"I don't know, that's why I'm asking him."

However, that didn't mean that he had no idea.

His blood-lust vanished when he heard Orobas' name.

The name of the dragon Raphael had killed. If it was when he realised that Fol was his daughter that he lost his will to fight, then his actions took on another meaning.

Atonement.

A holy knight would feel no obligation to a dragon or mage, but that thought was consistent. As Zagan looked down at him, Chastel tugged on his robe.

"W-wait, Zagan."

"...You getting involved will make things complicated. Stay quiet for a bit."

"That's not it." Chastel looked at Raphael. "It was hard for me to believe right away, but I'm right, aren't I?"

"What are you talking about?"

Chastel spoke clearly as Zagan frowned.

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"You were that hooded man, Orobas, right?"

""Hah...?""
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That was the name of Fol's father, and the dragon Raphael had killed. Both Zagan and Fol doubted their ears at that. Only Barbarus wasn't following the conversation.

"Oi, what do you mean?"

Zagan drew closer to Chastel.

Then, with a crack, 'something' broke.



Gripping her sword again, Chastel spoke shakily.

"Zagan..."

"I know."

The sound had come from within the palace. He could tell something was moving beyond the broken entrance.

Is something... there...?

'Something' that shouldn't have been there when they investigated the other day.

And then, something unpleasant flowed forth.

It was like a strange wind that clung to the skin and stole their breath. There was no scent to it, but their stomachs froze and they felt nauseous.

An aura of harm... that would probably describe it well.

It was a cursed wind that naturally affected the body, but it also seemed to affect the mind.

"Uh... kuh..."

Chastel held her chest in pain. She had

been poisoned, but without her baptised armour, she was the most defenceless. With nothing else to do, Zagan stood in front of her to protect her.

Barbarus spoke with a flustered voice.

"O-oi, what's happening."

"Like I know."

Zagan answered, and the 'something' finally appeared from the gate.

It was similar to a human.

It had a head, two arms, and two legs.

However, it was by no means a human.

Its skin was something hard and rock-like, and each time it breathed, the unpleasant atmosphere throbbed. It had black crack-like muscles running over its body, and he could tell they were probably something like blood vessels.

The strangest thing was its face.

It had a mouth with short horns on its forehead, its eyes were bloodshot, with one being in the centre of its face and one around its left ear. It had no nose, and instead had a barnacle-like protrusion that swung around, inhaling and exhaling.

However, it wasn't breathing air, it was mana. He could tell from Chastel's reaction as she held her chest.

Humans, living things, nature, everything had mana, regardless of whether it was alive or not, and this was devouring it.

However, Zagan knew this atmosphere. And he remembered its form.

"Is this... a demon?"

He muttered, before immediately noticing that it was wrong.

I can't feel the same fear as with that demon.

Barbarus had summoned a demon before, the monster in front of them now was similar, but the demon had been more unnatural.

Finally, Fol spoke with a groan.

"No. This is... the palace's... gatekeeper."

The statue that was modelled on a demon, sealed by some magic circle.

"...I see. An aftereffect of that clash between the holy swords?"

Had it broken the seal, or was it a coincidence?

No, it was probably sealed.

Marchosias wasn't so senile as to allow something like this to happen by coincidence.

"Is it a type of golem...?"

Even though it was similar in form to a demon, it had started as something far different. At the least, it wasn't an absolute existence that filled Zagan with fear that it was un-winnable.

That aside, it was Marchosias' legacy. It couldn't be as poorly made as it seemed. It was unknown even to Zagan.

"Im...possible..."

Raphael spoke hoarsely. Apparently, he had recovered enough to speak.

It seems that he wants to speak too.

Though that said, the monster in front of them didn't seem to be listening and they would have to eliminate it first.

"Now then, what should we do?"

Zagan muttered. Its eyes glared at Zagan.

Blood-lust.

When he felt that, Zagan focused on the Demon Lord's Seal on his right hand.

If it was something that followed the same logic as a demon, then he might be able to send it away like before.

Zagan raised his right hand and chanted.

"I, Zagan, order you by the Demon Lord's Seal. Unnatural one, return from whence you came."

The Seal let off an unpleasant light in response to his call. The demon that he had met before had knelt and vanished when ordered like that. This time...

"Damn, it didn't work. It's coming!"

Zagan clicked his tongue.

The mouth on its forehead opened, and destructive mana began to gather there. It would attack.

He looked behind him, and the first thing he saw was Chastel, who could still not stand.

Even without her baptised armour, she hasn't died?

Reflexively, he caught her by the back of her neck and jumped away. So he missed it. Chastel had been covering someone behind her.

"Get back, Fol!"

Fol was frozen in shock at the sudden occurrence. Then, the light erupted from the monster's mouth.

The light shot through where Zagan had been standing, and Fol vanished. He had the feeling he had seen something cover her immediately before that.

When the torrent of light died down, the floor had been fused into a glass. Within the scorched ground, there was an area that had remained as stone, and in that area, there were two figures.

"U-uhh..."

Fol, who was letting out a small groan, and Raphael, who had covered her.

He had nothing from his left shoulder.

Zagan's anger flared. He didn't know if the rage was at himself for not being able to protect Fol, or for having the conclusion with an enemy taken from him.

Whichever it was, it was plenty reason for Zagan to fight.

The monster once more opened its mouth.

"...Aren't you getting too cocky, you stupid doll?" Zagan spat, after having jumped at the monster's head. "I'll crush you, Heaven Scale."

In an instant, Zagan's palm was covered by a shield that was composed over two thousand circuits, that was so solid it was destructive. Crushing his hand around the magic circle, Zagan's fist descended. The mouth that had been gathering mana, and the head as a whole was pulverised.

Even under normal circumstances, Zagan could crush rocks, and Heaven Scale increased that. The destruction didn't stop at its head, and split the monster in two down its torso. As it split to the left and right, it was mere stone, and fell slowly to the floor.

Without even checking to see that it was dealt with, Zagan rushed straight to Fol and Raphael, who had taken the brunt of the attack.

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"Oi, are you two alive?"
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Fol's eyes cracked open at his voice.

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"I'm... okay..."
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For some reason, Raphael had used his holy sword and body to protect Fol, and the young girl didn't have a scratch on her.

However, that wasn't the case for Raphael. Fol was looking at his form that had lost his entire left arm in confusion.

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"What were you trying to do?"
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Apparently, Raphael was still conscious, and opened his eyes.

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"...I just did my job, it has nothing to do with you."
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The wound was so severe his sense of pain had probably been numbed, and his voice didn't sound pained.

It's too close to his heart though.

He didn't know how Raphael's regeneration worked, but having his arm blown off from the shoulder down would mean the wound would also reach the heart. He had already bled enough to die, and it didn't seem like the dragon's power would help him now.

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And yet...
"Guh... Nghhh...!"
Raphael stood.
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He had taken a grievous wound, and blood was pouring from him, dyeing his armour red, even his face had the pallid tinge of death, why did the man stand.

No, why did he have to stand?

Even as he coughed up blood, Raphael spoke composedly.

"You called me Orobas' foe."

"...I-I did."

Even the man's stubbornness was something to behold, and Fol nodded, overwhelmed. Raphael looked straight at the young girl and spoke.

"That's a mistake. That great dragon was not such a pitiful existence as to fall to the likes of me."

That was what Zagan had doubted.

Holy swords are certainly a nuisance, but are they enough to defeat a legendary dragon?

It wasn't even certain that the thirteen Demon Lords would be able to defeat a legendary dragon.

Raphael might have strength beyond the norm for holy knights, but if Zagan could overwhelm him, he wouldn't be able to kill Orobas. Fol cried out, as if she didn't want to accept that reality.

"You're lying! I saw it. I saw you devouring my father! You ambushed him."

"Then I ask you this. Was the Orobas you knew a weak enough dragon to be defeated by the betrayal of a mere human?"

"...Are you still ridiculing my father, even now!?"

"The one ridiculing Orobas is you," Raphael spoke to Fol, who was confused. "What you think of me is of no matter to me. However, for the sake of Orobas' honour, I tell you this. That great dragon would never fall afoul of us mere humans."

"What... do you mean?"

Raphael let out a quiet sigh.

"That day, I entreated the great dragon Orobas for aid to defeat an enemy, and he granted that desire."

"An enemy...?"

What enemy would be so strong that a holy knight would have to ask a dragon for aid with?

A Demon Lord... perhaps?

Zagan waited with baited breath for him to continue.

Finally, Raphael's gaze moved. His eyes didn't look towards Fol, not to Zagan or Chastel, he looked past them, to the stone that Zagan had pulverised.

"Demons, that is the name they have been given through the ages."

Fol's eyes opened wide.

"Don't be foolish. I've not heard of anything like that existing now."

"Then what is that? Is that not a monster far removed from anything that we speak of?"

"...That's..."

Fol couldn't answer.

"I understand that you don't wish to admit it. I too thought that they had left this world. However, a demon appeared in this world, and brought death to that great dragon and many holy knights." Raphael told her, coughing blood with his words. "In the not too distant future, they will return."

Fol turned her eyes imploringly to Zagan at the hard to believe words.

Zagan nodded right back to her.

"It's the truth. I don't know about them returning, but demons still exist. That's why I've been looking for a way to kill them."

He hadn't felt the strain as Raphael had been talking, but he had realised that if he had to fight them, he had no means to resist.

Perhaps Barbarus succeeding in that summoning was an omen.

Barbarus was indeed a mage of significant power, but the sacrifices hadn't

been enough, and it had activated with Zagan's power, incomplete.

A demon should not be so insignificant that it could be summoned with such magic.

Fol probably realised that Zagan spoke the truth. The castle library was filled with books concerning demons after all. She looked up at Raphael in disbelief.

"Then, father challenged a demon and lost?"

At that, Raphael shook his head.

"He did not lose, he lay down his life to defeat them."

That was just another way of putting it. However, it showed that he believed in the prideful battle of the dragon. Fol was the same.

She pressed her lips tightly together and mumbled.

"...Then... who should I hate?"

"You shouldn't hate, you should be proud."

Fol frowned.

"Be... proud?"

"Yes, be proud. Orobas put his life on the line to protect you, and the world you live in. If you are not proud of that, who will be?"

He said, and then knelt before Fol.

"I don't care if you kill me and revere Orobas. I offer my head to you." Raphael looked down at his body as it regenerated from what should have been a fatal wound. "Demons are powerful. If they return to this world whilst the church and mages are in conflict, we will have no chance of winning. We must prepare. And so, even though it disgusted me, I consumed Orobas' blood, and held on to life through his death."

That had been what Fol had seen. Raphael looked at Chastel.

"However, my duty is at its end. The seed of symbiosis has already begun to bud. If my last act is a gift to Orobas, I have no complaints."

Finally understanding everything, Zagan opened his mouth.

"Then that messenger of the 'symbiotic faction' that Chastel spoke of was you?"

Raphael nodded quietly.

"Indeed. While you are Demon Lord and Holy Knight Captain, the two of you have a connection. That is extremely close to my aim, so..."

"Oi oi oi, you can't believe him, right?" Barbarus voiced his disagreement. "You've killed hundreds of mages. That's supposed to be peace? Who'd agree with that."

Zagan had the same opinion with that. However, Raphael nodded in agreement.

"I know that all too well. I cannot be the face of symbiosis. That is why the Holy Maiden of the Sword is needed."

Chastel raised her voice, flustered at the huge role being pressed upon her.

"W-wait. I haven't accepted that yet..."

The target of her words could no longer hear them. With a rumble, the broken stone began to move. Looking in that direction, the monster that had been split right in two was beginning to stand once more.



"...Hah, there are too many immortals around."

There was Raphael, who lived despite having his entire arm blown off, and the previous Demon Lord's monster. Compared to them, Zagan might be the most human-like.

"I'll go deal with it again, wait here."

"Can you kill it? Something like that?"

Zagan shrugged at Raphael's words.

"Golems are outside my expertise, but if it's made with magic, I can destroy it."

"That's not a golem."

Zagan frowned at his surety.

"What do you mean?"

"That's what you would call a chimaera. Something else than a golem created by magic..."

Zagan felt a chill at those words.

"...Oi, you can't mean."

"Indeed. That is a chimaera that Marchosias created, of demons."

Zagan couldn't refute those words. Because when he had first seen it, he had thought of demons.

Damn you, Marchosias, that's an annoying thing you've left behind!

Raphael watched the monster in displeasure.

"I am sure of it. That's the remains of the demon that Orobas and I defeated. Marchosias must have recovered it and created a chimaera."

Remains would always be remains, they would fall short of the original's power, but it was still without a doubt a demon. Naturally, just hitting it would not destroy it.

Even so, a smile made its way to Zagan's face.

How convenient, I can perform another test.

The rock monster, the demon chimaera, had already ceased living. Zagan once again covered his hand in Heaven Scale and stepped forward.

"Chastel, you should go too."

"...I haven't said I agree with you yet, have I?"

"And yet you have already decided what you should do."

She didn't know what he meant, but Chastel nodded and took up her sword.

"Even without your words, I will wield my sword as I choose."

And then, Chastel recited quietly.

"I won't hesitate anymore, so lend me your power, holy sword Azrael."

These were the Flames of Purification, though rather than flames, it was more like light. They didn't take the form of wild flames like Raphael it was a pale light that coiled about the sword. However, they didn't feel ephemeral.

Zagan knew. The power that Raphael had put into flames was concentrated within the sword. Concentrated to a single point, it might even be able to cut through Heaven Scale.

Is she more powerful than Raphael, with just the holy sword's power?

Chastel stood next to a wide-eyed Zagan.

"I won't ask you to trust a holy knight, but I want to fight with you."

Zagan shrugged his shoulders.

"I doubt you have the skill to plot like that."

With her pitiful state over the past few days, he couldn't help but know.

"...Is that supposed to be praise, or condemnation?"

"Who knows?"

Chastel pouted in anger, then turned her face away and spoke.

"So, what are our chances?"

"There's something I want to test. But I need to hit directly, so I need to get right in close."

"Got it. Then I'll keep its attention."

The stone creature had finished its revival and its unpleasant eyes looked at them.

"It's coming."

"I know."

The repulsive mouth open on its forehead once more began to shine with gathered mana. It was the breath that had taken out Raphael.

He checked behind himself.

If I dodge, it will hit the two behind.

Barbarus was out of range, but the other two weren't. Fol might be able to escape, but Raphael could no longer move. Besides, letting his daughter be faced with something like that wasn't to his taste.

Zagan readied himself, but then his vision was obstructed by Chastel's back.

"Idiot, you don't have your baptised armour, you'll die."

"I said I'd keep its attention!"

Chastel shouted and ran.

The monster let off its breath attack. The light enveloped Chastel's body — or so it should have.

"Hah!"

Chastel slashed her sword with her cry.

The light breath was split right in two by the long sword.

The split breath missed Zagan and the two behind him before vanishing.

"Let's go, run, Zagan!"

Chastel continued on towards the monster.

She's rather brazen, isn't she?

But even so, Zagan was astonished at her strike. He hadn't seen the moment she slashed.

That aside, because Chastel wasn't wearing her baptised armour, there was a vast difference in physical capability between them. Zagan overtook her in a single breath, and entered into range of the monster in the blink of an eye.

The stone monster swung its arm.

"It's fast!"

Barbarus let out in surprise. Regardless of its massive body, it was as fast as Zagan.

That's too futile though.

It was a sweeping strike, but Zagan met it head-on with his fist. The stone fist shattered, the fragments flying through the air.

However, Zagan was the one to falter.

The fragments were connected by a disgusting black haze and changed their direction through the air as if they were conscious, raining down on Zagan.

So this is how it went back when I broke it!?

The stone body was just a front, and its true form was the black haze lurking within.

"Don't stop, Zagan!"

Those countless fragments were destroyed by a pure white light. It was Chastel's slash from where she had caught up. It looked like a white line passing through the fragments, separating them before the next slash swung through the air. There must have been dozens of slashes.

They were all so fast that it seemed like one continuous movement. The speed was surprising, but the truly amazing thing was the fact that although she was behind and the cuts were in front, none of the cuts had wounded Zagan.

Rather than admire it, a chill ran down his back.

If she had done this when we first met, would I have died?

When he first faced her as a holy knight, if she challenged him with this swordsmanship, Zagan would have been hard pressed.

However, she was now an ally he could trust to watch his back.

Zagan curled his hand around the Heaven Scale, and added another border of circuits.

"Heaven Scorch, burn to ash."

And then, he knocked his fist into the monster's torso.

That's right, it was a light enough hit to be called a knock. A pitiful blow for Zagan, who could smash rocks.

At that, Chastel groaned from behind her.

"It didn't work?"

"...No, it's already over."

He muttered, and raised his right hand, making a fist like he was crushing something.

Immediately afterwards, the monster burst into black flames.

They gushed forth for a mere instant, rushed across the skin like they were colouring it in, and then vanished.

And then, it was all over.

The blackened statue crumbled soundlessly.

Whatever regeneration you've got, without mana, you're just a lump of rock.

The fragments crumbled into dust and vanished before they hit the ground. After a moment, there was nothing left.

He looked over his shoulder and Chastel was stock still in shock.

"What did you do?"

Zagan created a magic circle on his palm.

"I have a spell called Heaven Scale. It takes in mana from the environment endlessly to strengthen itself and acts as a shield. I inverted it and put it inside."

"Inverted...?"

"It takes in mana without bound, and burns. The flames appear black because it's the mana itself burning."

Heaven Scale and Heaven Scorch, they were two contrasting spells within the same principles. Anti-holy sword and anti-demon, Zagan had devised them in the few weeks since he had obtained Marchosias' legacy.

That said, it had burnt even a chimaera created from the remains of a demon in an instant.

A human mage would be helpless against it. If the other Demon Lords knew of it, they would be likely to designate it as forbidden.

"It's still too imprecise. If I can't raise the efficiency, it won't affect demons."

The demon that Zagan had encountered had far more concentrated mana. It

was probable that in its current form, Heaven Scorch would be destroyed before it could burn the demon. It was incomplete, and there was still much room for improvement.

"You're a terrifying mage."

Chastel said shakily, but her voice seemed to hold respect.

So Zagan answered in kind.

"You're fairly skilled yourself, Chastel."

At that, for some reason, Chastel's eyes went wide and she covered her face.

"...What?"

"Nothing, just... that's the first time... you called me by name."

"Is it?" He hadn't really noticed, but he had indeed usually called her 'you' when talking to her. "Sorry about that."

"Y-you're apologising?"

"You're Nephie's friend. I should at least respect you."

A mage's manners were no different than a bandit's dignity though.

Chastel pouted and glared at him.

"I didn't just come for Nephie, I came to fight with you."

Zagan's eyes widened.

"Even though we're a mage and holy knight?"

"Even though we're a mage and holy knight."

Chastel answered that, and Zagan had someone that he hadn't known he could trust.

It certainly isn't a bad feeling to be able to trust someone to watch my back.

Even as he felt it wasn't like him, Zagan went to put it into words.

"Zagan!"

He turned at Fol's voice and finally saw Raphael collapse in exhaustion.

"I was certainly able to see the fastest sword of the holy knight captains."

Raphael grinned where he lay on the ground. His smile was fierce enough that it was like he might attack at any moment, but that just seemed to be his usual smile.

"Don't talk too much. I'm bad with healing magic."

Zagan was giving Raphael first aid with magic, but his wounds were too deep. The most Zagan could do was to stem the bleeding. His draconic regeneration had weakened, and was only extending his life by a little.

Raphael spoke somewhat tiredly.

"Chastel, whatever your thoughts, your actions themselves have made you our face. Those who sympathise with me will help you.

"Lord Raphael..."

Chastel looked at him with a conflicted expression.

However, Zagan spoke.

"The symbiotic faction, huh. Barbarus said so earlier, but I just can't understand it. If you need a face, why not do it yourself? You're a holy sword wielder too."

"Within the church itself, that would be enough. But just as he said, I have killed too many mages, if I called for unity now, the mages would never agree."

That was why they needed someone like Chastel. Chastel suddenly made an expression of realisation.

"Is that why you used Orobas' name, because yours wouldn't be believed?"

"That's also true, however, my survival, and the establishment of the symbiotic faction is all Orobas' dying wish. Thus his name is suitable for its leader."

That was how absolute Orobas' existence was to him. Zagan could understand that, but he could not agree.

"Why did you cut the mages down in the first place? Did you have some kind of grudge?"

He had no intention to claim that they were good people. In fact, mages were without exception villainous. He couldn't think of a reason that they shouldn't be hated, but even so, killing nearly five-hundred was no fleeting resentment.

However, Raphael's answer was unexpected.

"I didn't go out of my way to kill them. The mages just attacked me for some reason."

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""""Hah...?"""
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It wasn't just Zagan that let out a dull sound, it was everyone there.

Raphael murmured in puzzlement.

"I wonder why. I was trying to have a gentlemanly conversation. I even smiled to show I meant no harm, but the mages didn't even wait for me to speak and attacked. Even I will fight back if attacked. And thus, it ended with me cutting them down."

Zagan was in shock, not getting what he was saying.

"...Wait a minute. You were pretty confrontational when we met in the tavern."

"I was trying to tell you about the dangers of a friendly relationship with Chastel?"

His head ached.

Chastel shook her head in confusion as well.

"B-but when we first met, you asked me how many mages I had killed... Huh, was that an act so people wouldn't guess that you were part of the symbiotic faction?"

"What are you talking about? If you had killed mages like I had, you couldn't be our banner. And you answered that it was not a number to take pride in, that was why I had confidence in you."

He returned seriously, and Chastel held her head in her hands. Though then, she nodded.

"Now that you mention it, was that why you negotiated for the return of my

holy sword?"

"How would a holy knight protect themselves without a holy sword?"

Apparently, something had happened with Chastel. Zagan remembered his conversation with Raphael as well.

He had spoken confusingly, but he had certainly hadn't spoken a word of wanting to kill Chastel. His words and actions were a threat from the church, but that didn't mean that Raphael agreed with their views.

Well, if you were trying to get mages and holy knights to work together, it would be with someone like Chastel.

In other words, it was to gain sympathy. Though it didn't seem that way in the slightest.

"But nearly five-hundred."

"They attacked me essentially daily. When there were no mages, I moved on to a new place."

Apparently, the numbers had increased with each place he went. He couldn't agree, but Zagan reluctantly understood.

Of course, he sighed.

"Think about your appearance. If you speak misleadingly when you look like that, anyone will think you're an enemy."

At this statement from Zagan, Barbarus made a face of shock that

Zagan

was saying that, and Zagan made a mental note to hit him later.

He clenched a fist, and Raphael stood slowly.

"Chastel, you can return to the church. I will deal with the person that tried to remove you. I will survive that long at least."

"You know the culprit?"

"And you haven't realised?"

It wasn't that she had no idea, Chastel's face drained of colour.

There are indeed very few within the church other than Raphael that could have done it.

She wasn't familiar with the inner workings of the church, but by process of elimination, only one person came to mind.

Finally, Raphael looked to Fol.

"I promised you my head, but please wait until then."

Fol couldn't answer those words, and instead asked a question.

"... Answer one thing. What kind of dragon was Orobas to you?"

Raphael nodded solemnly.

"He was a great dragon. Riding on his back, and fighting together with him were the best times of my life."

"...I see."

Fol didn't try and stop him leaving, nor try to kill him.

"Are you sure?"

"...I don't know. But I don't know if killing him is the right thing to do."

Zagan softly stroked her head.

"Then isn't that fine?" Then he held out his hand to Fol. "We're going home. Nephie's going to be tired of waiting."

"...Right."

Zagan didn't know if giving up on revenge was the right thing either. But even so, he could feel no hatred from Fol towards holy knights.

So this is fine.

Her hatred might swell again, she may be lost, but Zagan and Nephie had decided to stand by her side.

Then, Chastel spoke.

"Umm, what about me?"

"Go back to the church, tail-head."

Chastel began to cry at Fol remaining hostile to her.

However, at some point, Barbarus had left, so it was near dawn by the time they returned to the castle. Even so, Nephie was there to greet them.

"Welcome back, Zagan-sama, Fol, Chastel-san."

And that same morning, they would hear of how Raphael dealt with things.



"I see, so Chastel's whereabouts are still unknown..."

The aged Cardinal murmured grievingly at the report from Chastel's subordinates, the Three Knight of the Azure Sky.

"We have no excuse, we have had no results."

"You are not at fault. I too was responsible for her safety. Rest for now."

"At once!"

The three bowed their heads and left Clavell's office.

When the door closed, Clavell could not contain himself and spoke.

"Ohh... Chastel, my knight... why will you not die for me?"

His face curved wickedly through his hands.

"Mages are evil, those that support them are likewise evil. If a holy sword wielder is stained by evil, the next may inherit that and will be unable to carry out justice."

If Chastel were killed, the holy sword would choose its next, pure wielder.

A wielder that he would surely this time raise as an incarnation of justice. It had been scrupulously hidden, but this was not the first time that Clavell had assassinated a holy sword wielder. He had slain those that could not show the absolute power as a sword of justice, those that had differing views than him, those that had hesitated to kill mages, and those that were unsuitable to wield a holy sword.

Fortunately, Kianoides was the territory of the previous Demon Lord, Marchosias, so no one would doubt they had died through fighting him.

This was not a defeat of the holy swords. The wielders were unsuitable, and so had not been able to use their true power, and had died, so this could be called the will of the holy swords.

However, this was different.

"If Raphael hadn't interfered..."

Chastel had foolishly said that she didn't wish to fight the Demon Lord. He had taken her holy sword immediately and begun preparations for her execution. It had taken time because he had to deal with the other Cardinals' reactions. Indeed, Clavell was not protecting her, she had been protected because the other Cardinals had stopped him. Chastel had then gone missing with her holy sword.

Damn you... Did that poison not kill you either?

It was a prized poison developed to torture captured mages, with a high lethality.

Mages would be brought to death by drinking it, so Chastel shouldn't have survived. And yet, there was no corpse nor holy sword to be found.

If Raphael hadn't insisted on returning her holy sword, these troubles would never have happened.

"Those three knights were no help either."

They blindly served Chastel. So he had set them under observation thinking that they would be able to easily find her, but they had aimlessly wandered the town and found nothing.

Or did they notice the observation?

Even those three were amongst the ten strongest in Kianoides. Even on the day that Zagan had become a Demon Lord, they had chased after Chastel and succeeded in rescuing her, so they may have noticed that they were being used as accomplices in her assassination.

He would have to think of another method.

As he groaned, a knock came at his door.

"...I'm sorry, but I wish to be alone now, can you come back later?"

He had no desire to talk calmly with someone when he was so angry and highly strung.

However, regardless of that, the door was flung open.

"I'm coming in, Clavell."

Standing there was none other than the giant holy knight, Raphael.

"W-what are you doing, you insolent...?"

He spoke fearfully, and then noticed that Raphael was covered in blood, and lacking an arm, so deeply wounded that it was a wonder he still lived.

"Lord Raphael, those wounds... No, more importantly, I will treat you!"

He quickly slipped poison into his hand. He didn't know what had happened, but this man was one of the 'evil' that Clavell had to kill.

This wasn't a set goal, but it would raise his influence within the church. If he had known that Raphael was part of the faction that he hated the most, the symbiotic faction, he wouldn't have chosen the method. However, for better or worse, Raphael's looks meant that none in the church would think that.

Raphael sat himself in the seat in front of Clavell.

"What, don't worry about it. I just came to finish some small matters. I'll go soon."

"B-but..."

It happened when he reached out with a poison-coated glove to smear on Raphael's wound.

"Eh...?"

His arm fell to the floor.

"Unfortunately, I have no desire to be touched by a poison-coated hand."

Faster than Clavell could see, Raphael had cut off his right arm.

"Guaah-phg?"

He crouched and went to scream, but his mouth was covered by a booted

foot, and several shattered teeth rolled across the floor.

"Don't make so much noise. This is the first time I've killed a man through choice. I'm probably slightly nervous."

Why me?

He couldn't speak, but his eyes asked that question.

"You and I are old. We shouldn't be interfering with the younger generation's way of doing things. Nipping possibilities in the bud is absurd." He said, and then drew his holy sword. "You can die by the sword you like so much, why not be happier?"

"Phgugugug?"

His eyes went wide, and he tried to shake his head, but the boot on his face meant that he could do nothing.

Someone help me!

Why were none of the holy sword wielders in Kianoides coming to help him?

The three knights that just returned?

Why was he, an orator of the age of God having his life threatened by 'evil' like this?

No matter how much he yelled mentally, the 'justice' that Clavell believed in did not protect him.

"I'll send you there myself. Wait for me in the underworld."

The holy sword descended straight for him.

That was the final thing Clavell saw in this world.

Epilogue

"...I see, so the culprit really was Cardinal Clavell?"

Chastel murmured somewhat sadly within a guest room in Zagan's castle.

Other than her, Zagan and Nephie, along with Fol, were gathered in the room. Zagan had just told Chastel of Clavell's death, and that the one to try to assassinate her was none other than him.

"He was someone that had no doubts as to the 'rightness' of the church."

So he had been able to decide that not only were mages evil, but that Chastel, who supported one, was also an enemy.

Nephie questioned her hesitantly.

"Chastel-san, did you know?"

"I had a faint idea... I didn't want to believe it, but he was always the one unconcernedly brewing tea."

That was probably why Chastel had drunk the tea without thinking about it.

Zagan huffed.

"Pathetic. There's no one decent amongst those proclaiming justice."

"You said that before." That was the first time they had fought.
Understandably saddened, Chastel slumped. "But even so, is it so wrong for a person to believe what they're doing is right."

"It's their prerogative to believe so. But the instant they doubt themselves, they will hesitate. By that logic, the one to try and kill you was correct, because he didn't hesitate to do so."

That was what justice was. To have no hesitation, because you were right. If it was done too blindly, it became fanaticism, and a great strength. That was the basis of the church's power.

"You're always so harsh."

She had a pained smile, but it wasn't the expression of someone stricken by

grief. Chastel took a sip of the tea next to her and stood.

"I'll return to the church. I think it's going in the wrong direction at the moment. I'm not conceited enough to say I will correct it, but I'd like to change it at least a little."

"I see."

Chastel gave another pained smile at his short answer.

"You can't say anything other than that, even at a time like this."

At that, he felt like he might have done something he shouldn't. He was still unfeeling, but he worried a little being told that.

So, Zagan pointed at her cup.

"Actually, that tea is poisoned."

"Hiee?"

She seemed like she was about to drop the cup as she yelled panickily.

She starts shaking right after being told.

After watching her panic for a while, Zagan spoke disinterestedly to her.

"...It's a joke, you should really doubt what people tell you."

Well, she would have probably realised even if he had said nothing. She picked up the cup and glared at him.

"...That was in poor taste, don't you think?"

"Was it?"

"Of course, Nephie brewed it, right? And yet you made me spill it."

Zagan tilted his head at the criticism.

"Nephie didn't brew that tea though?"

"Eh? Wait, eh...? Then who did?"

"Who knows?"

He answered evasively, but of course, Zagan didn't know how to brew tea. Chastel finally looked towards the only person left, Fol. Well, Nephie might have taught her, but she didn't think that Fol would brew it for her.

Chastel herself knew that.

Ceremoniously, she knelt in front of the young girl.

"We never did get to talk properly in the end." She said, and reached out her hand to stroke Fol's head, but Fol immediately hid herself behind Zagan. "Haha ha... Well, looks like it'll be hard to get along."

With nothing else she could do, she smiled and stood up.

"...Come again... Chastel."

Fol spoke in a quietly, but clearly.

Tears welled in Chastel's eyes.

"Uuu... finally... finally, you used my name!"

"You're still crying?"

Fol let out an astonished sigh.

Chastel finally stopped crying and went to leave.

"It wasn't a long time, but thank you for your care. I don't know about being responsible for the symbiotic faction or anything, but I'll do my utmost to make this a world you can live at least a little more easily in."

Then, a hoarse voice interjected.

"I see. You've resolved yourself."

"I think it's beyond me, but I'll try."

"If anything troubles you, tell me. What I can do with one arm is limited, but I will help you."

The owner of the voice was a man that had appeared soundlessly, carrying a tea set in his single arm.

"I thank you, Lord... Raphael...?"

Chastel suddenly raised her face as she spoke.

He was standing there, so tall she had to crane her neck.

"Should you be up? Raphael."

Indeed, it was Raphael. As thanks for treating his wounds, he had prepared the tea that morning.

"Indeed, I have Orobas' protection. With that Elf's sorcery, this kind of wound is not enough to take me."

That said, he hadn't been able to regain his arm. His strength as a holy knight had been greatly reduced.

Zagan glanced back at him.

"Can you still wield a holy sword like that."

"It is not so much that I can't fight. Besides, I am old, the holy sword should choose its next wielder soon."

"I see. Then I'll have you use it as much as you can."

"Fha, it'll cost a lot to have me use it."

That was probably Raphael's way of telling Zagan to pay him. It was a somewhat hard to understand way of putting it, but Zagan might seem the same. At that thought, he slumped slightly.

"Wait, what are you pair chatting away so peacefully for!?"

Zagan grimaced.

"Quit your yelling. Is there a problem with that?"

"Of course there is! I was sure that Lord Raphael had died..."

When they had last parted, Zagan had thought so too. But he had honestly come to Zagan's castle to offer his head to Fol. Chastel had passed out from exhaustion, so he hadn't greeted her.

Zagan pointed at Raphael.

"In the first place, he was the one that told me that Clavell was dealt with."

"Wha?"

Otherwise, rumours of the Cardinal's death wouldn't have reached the castle, and the church would have made plans to suppress the information.

Helplessly, Chastel fell to the floor.

"But, if you're alive. I'm a little relieved."

"You're naive, act like that and you should have no complaints about being stabbed in the back, right?"

His tone was as if he might cut her down there and then, and Chastel's expression stiffened.

"Ah... he means that it's dangerous to think like that when you might be betrayed at any time."

Zagan calmly explained, and Raphael nodded deeply.

"Of course, my King, your discernment is laudable."

"No, I more or less got it too... Wait, 'my King'?"

Raphael nodded plainly at her shock.

"I didn't say, did I? I have been employed as Lord Zagan's butler. I am retiring as a holy knight from this day forward."

Zagan covered his ears from Chastel's yell and remembered Raphael and Fol's conversation.

"As promised, I have come to deliver my head."

Zagan had sensed Raphael's exhausted form at the door with his bounded fields, and other than Chastel, they rushed to meet him, and that was the first thing out of his mouth.

He had not directly killed Orobas, but he could be called a foe. So it was Fol that would decide how to deal with him.

After worrying for a full minute, this is what Fol answered with.

"Then devote yourself to Zagan and Nephie, and that will be for me."

And thus, Raphael had come to work at the castle as well.

This should advance my research into the Demon Lord's Seal.

He had gained books on holy swords from Marchosias' legacy, but having the real thing was something completely different. If he could decipher the crest engraved into the holy swords, he should be able to figure out the true form of the Demon Lord's Seal as well.

And even if not, there would never be enough people to help with maintaining the castle and managing the Demon Lord's Palace. If they were trustworthy, he would have no complaints with a mage or a holy knight.

Besides, I can't just think of him as some other person.

Zagan himself may have ended up like Raphael if he hadn't met Nephie.

Fol looked steadily up at Raphael.

"What is it?"

"Is it... hard, having one arm?"

"Hmph, it's nothing you need to concern yourself with."

"...Wait a minute."

Leaving those words behind, Fol left Chastel's room. Chastel felt she had lost her chance to leave, and entwined her fingers around each other.

Before long, Fol returned.

In her arms was a huge left arm of armour, the papier mache one she had used as the Apparition when she came to the castle.

"...Bend down."

"Hmm?"

Raphael knelt, and Fol put it on his left shoulder. She then muttered something and the empty armour shone faintly.

"It should move."

"Ohh..."

Raphael let out a sound of admiration. This was the magic Fol had used to control her armour as Valefar, she had used it to let Raphael control it.

"To think that after Orobas, I would also be indebted to his daughter. I offer

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my life to thee."
 "...You're exaggerating."
 She turned her face away, but her cheeks were dyed red.
  Chastel then spoke awkwardly.
  "Ummm... So I'm the only one leaving?"
  "Well, it looks that way."
  "Ah. but..."
 She had chosen to herself, but Chastel began to cry again.
  Reluctantly, Zagan opened his mouth.
  "You can come whenever you like, alright? Nephie and Fol will be happy."
  "...I will be?"
  "You will, right?"
 Fol looked like she would say otherwise, but didn't deny it.
 Chastel looked up at Zagan.
  "And you, Zagan...?"
 Zagan hadn't expected her to say so, and his eyes widened. Then, he spoke
helplessly as he scratched his head.
 "...Well, we can have a drink together, sometimes."
  Chastel's face cleared.
  "Right! I'll do my best!"
 So saying, this time, the Maiden of the Holy Sword did indeed leave.
  "Honestly, she's so noisy..." He spoke as he stood next to Nephie. For some
reason, she faced away from him, and her cheeks were slightly puffed up, and
he felt she looked displeased. "Nephie?"
  "What is it?"
  "...Why are you angry?"
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Nephie tilted her head as if she didn't understand.

"Do I seem to be?"

"It's because you do that I asked..."

At that, Nephie tightly hugged on to his arm.

"Then take a guess."

Two soft mounds pressed into him, and he could feel her heart racing through them. Her pointed ears were slightly red at the tips, and he could tell she was shaking slightly.

She's angry, but what is she expecting?

He worried over the difficult demand, and then put his hand on her cheek.

"I'm sorry for leaving you yesterday."

Nephie's eyes widened in shock, and she buried her face in his arm.

"...Zagan-sama, you're not fair."

Was Zagan's answer right in the end?

Regardless, Nephie seemed to have regained her cheer.

"...Raphael, I can't see."

"It's too soon for you, Fol."

And thus, the new residents of the castle watched their conversation.

